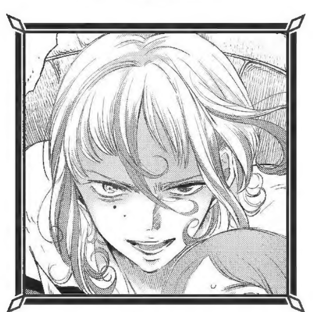

CHILDREN OF THE WHALES
7
ABI UMEDA


CHILDREN OF THE WHALES
Story and Art by Abi Umeda
Volume
7

The United Kingdom of Suidelasia



Rochalízo

His ship washed up on the Mud Whale. He is the son of the duke of Amonlogia, of the United Kingdom of Suidelasia. He says he will lead the Mud Whale to his country.

The Empire



Orca

Commander of the apátheia forces that attacked the Mud Whale. He was tried for his role in the sinking of the Skyros but managed to evade punishment by spinning a convincing tale of Kataklysmós, the end of the world. He is Lykos's older brother.

A Record of the Mud Whale and the Sea of Sand



Year 93 of the Sand Exile.

The Mud Whale drifts endlessly through the Sea of Sand, home to about 500 people who know nothing of the outside world.

The Marked are those who can wield thymia, a psychic power fueled by emotion. They die young, around the age of 30. Those who have no thymia are called the Unmarked.

Chakuro, the Mud Whale archivist, meets Lykos one day on an abandoned island-ship found floating near theirs. She eventually opens up to the children on the Mud Whale, and together they fend off two attacks by her homeland before finally setting off for the outside world.

The plan is to sail to Amonlogia, Rochalízo's country, but then Lykos reveals the shocking truth that Fálaina isn't ingesting their emotions—it is ingesting the life force of the Marked.

Mayor Suou decides to hide this knowledge from the Marked until they can all safely abandon the island. Meanwhile, a coup against Suou and the Unmarked hatches in a dark corner of the Mud Whale...

"The Mud Whale was our entire world."

Characters

On the Mud Whale



Ouni

(Marked, 16 years old)

A very powerful thymia user. He has the power to destroy Nouses and is called the daímonas by the Allied Empire.



Lykos

(Marked, 14 years old)

A girl from the Allied Empire who comes aboard the Mud Whale. She has a connection with Chakuro and others on the Mud Whale and decides to stay with them.



Chakuro

(Marked, 14 years old)

The young archivist of the Mud Whale. He has hypergraphia, a disorder that compels him to record everything.



Aíma

(???)

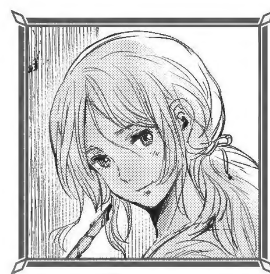
She appears to Chakuro after Neri disappears. She gives Chakuro the Mud Whale's rudder.



Neri

(???)

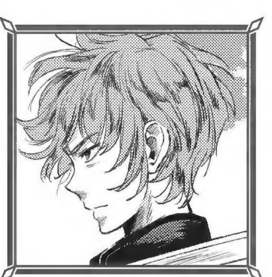
A girl with superhuman powers who disappears when Aíma appears.



Suou

(Unmarked, 17 years old)

The new mayor of the Mud Whale. He has decided to find a way to escape the Mud Whale in order to save the Marked.



Kuchiba

(Unmarked, 39 years old)

An adviser to the mayor. He had feelings for the previous mayor, Taisha.



Ginshu

(Marked, 16 years old)

Serves in the Vigilante Corps. Wide-eyed and the life of the party.



Commander

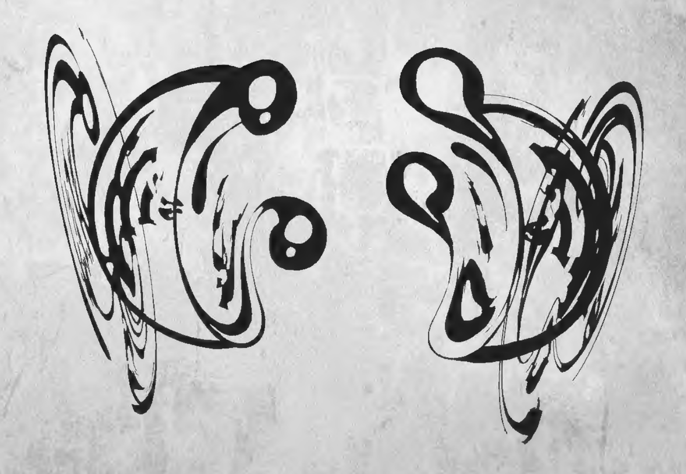
(Marked, 25 years old)

Head of the Vigilante Corps. Tries to rein in Ouni, who dreams of going to the outside world.

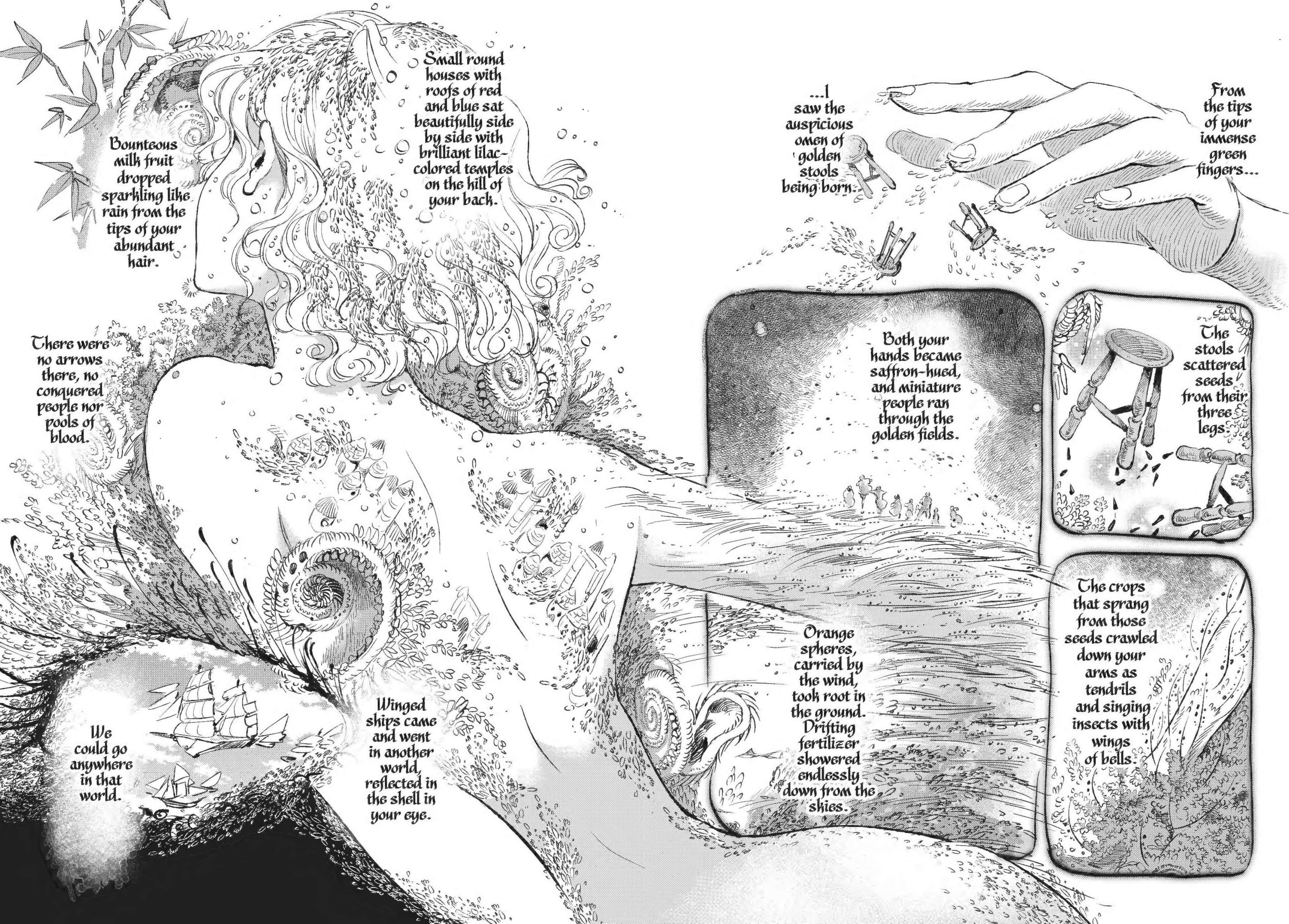


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Chapter 25
An Encounter



From the tips of your immense green fingers...
...I saw the auspicious omen of golden stools being born.
Both your hands became saffron-hued, and miniature people ran through the golden fields.
The stools scattered seeds from their three legs.
The crops that sprang from those seeds crawled down your arms as tendrils and singing insects with wings of bells.
Orange spheres, carried by the wind, took root in the ground. Drifting fertilizer showered endlessly down from the skies.
Small round houses with roofs of red and blue sat beautifully side by side with brilliant lilac-colored temples on the hill of your back.
Bounteous milk fruit dropped sparkling like rain from the tips of your abundant hair.
There were no arrows there, no conquered people nor pools of blood.
Winged ships came and went in another world, reflected in the shell in your eye.
We could go anywhere in that world.


TMP
OH, I WAS RIGHT...
IT'S THE SAND SONG SUOU WROTE WHILE THE MUD WHALE...
...WAS HEADED TOWARDS AMON-LOGIA.
With this song, he envisioned...
...an abundant, ideal new world for us.
KIKUJIN...
...DO YOU NEED THIS TOO?
Back then...
...we traveled, dreaming often of finding a place just like that.

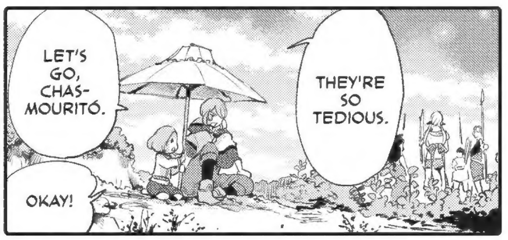

KSSSH
CHRR
WFF...
TA-DAAA!
BY USING THE AMONLOGIAN SAND CLOCK ENERGY AS A STARTING POINT...
...WE HAVE DEVELOPED A NEW WEAPON!
WITH THIS *THYMIA SHOOTER*, YOU CAN FOCUS YOUR ATTACK...
CHAK
...REGARDLESS OF YOUR THYMIA SKILL!
I DON'T LIKE IT...
IT'S BARBARIC TO ENJOY MAKING WEAPONS TO HURT PEOPLE.
WHAT?! DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND THE ART OF CREATING?
QUIT WORKING THAT PATHETIC BRAIN OF YOURS AND WORK YOUR PATHETIC BODY INSTEAD, YOU PATHETIC BALDY.
HEY, STOP PLAYING AROUND!

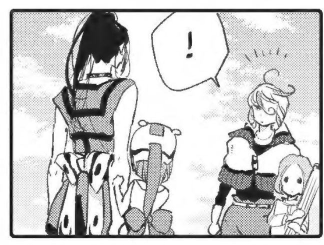
WE AREN'T DONE WITH OUR MORNING TRAINING YET.

DON'T GET SLOPPY.

YOU NEED TO BE ON GUARD, AS IF THE THREAT FROM THE EMPIRE IS ALWAYS AROUND.

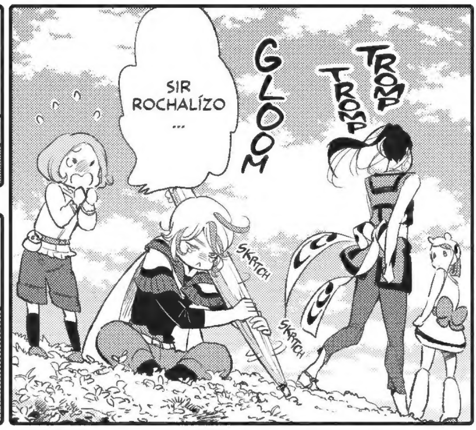
I'm not playing!










TROMP
TROMP
GLOOM
SIR ROCHALÍZO ...
SKRTCH
SKRTCH


OUNI!
HUH?!
WHAT'S OUNI DOING HERE?


...
...I...

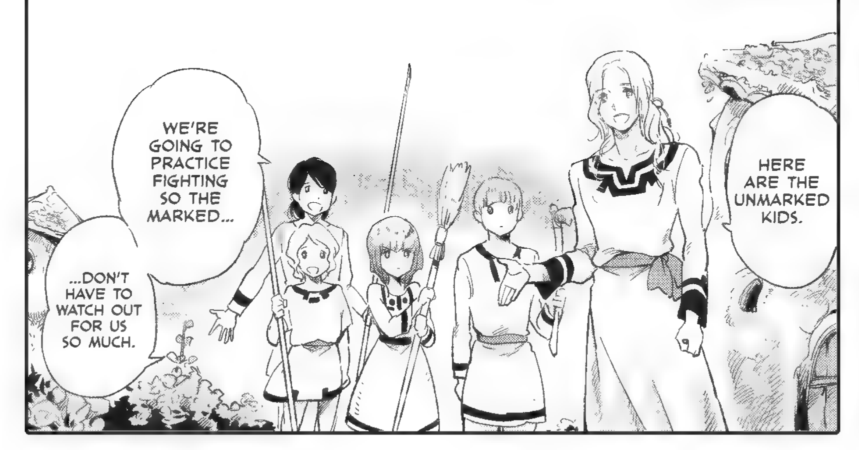

...THE ARCHIVIST ASKED ME TO COME.
DON'T GO!

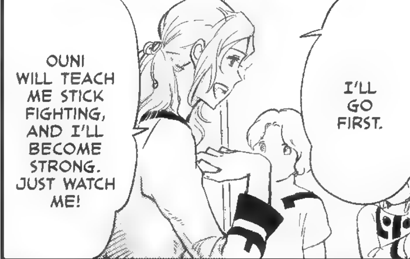

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE, MAKING OUNI COME TO YOU...
...YOU DESTROYER?
YANK
URRR!


OUNI IS REALLY STRONG, SO I WANT HIM TO BE THE COMBAT-TRAINING TEACHER.

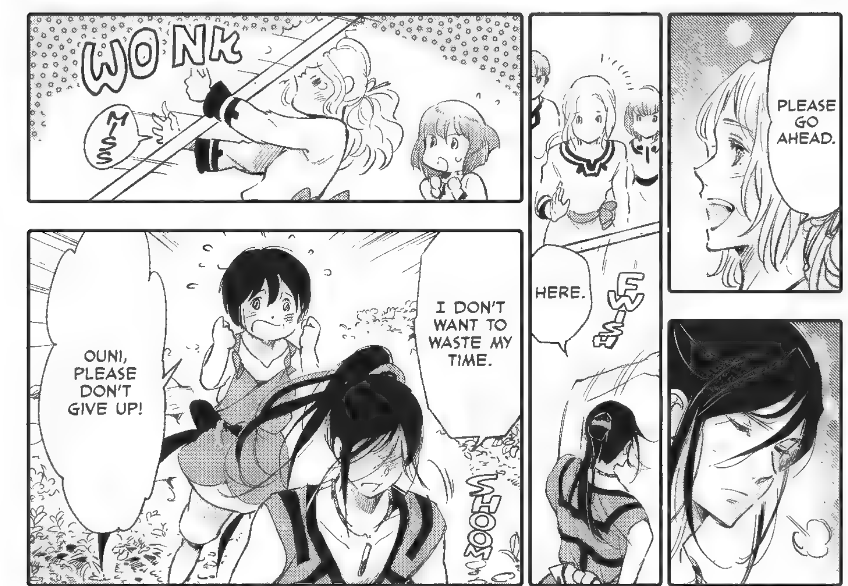

I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU, MY THYMIA...


Oh!
THERE THEY ARE!


HERE ARE THE UNMARKED KIDS.
WE'RE GOING TO PRACTICE FIGHTING SO THE MARKED...
...DON'T HAVE TO WATCH OUT FOR US SO MUCH.


I'LL GO FIRST.
OUNI WILL TEACH ME STICK FIGHTING, AND I'LL BECOME STRONG. JUST WATCH ME!


I ONLY HAVE BAD FEELINGS ABOUT THIS!
GINSHU!
PAT PAT


PLEASE GO AHEAD.
HERE.
FWISH
WONK
MISS
I DON'T WANT TO WASTE MY TIME.
SHOOM
OUNI, PLEASE DON'T GIVE UP!

DETERMINED

YOU'RE THINKING TOO MUCH, SO YOUR BODY WON'T MOVE.

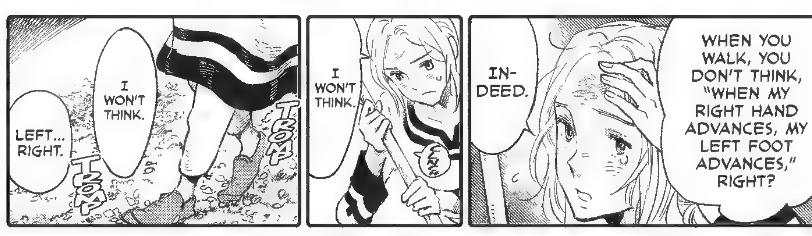
I CAN'T WATCH THIS ANYMORE, SUOU.

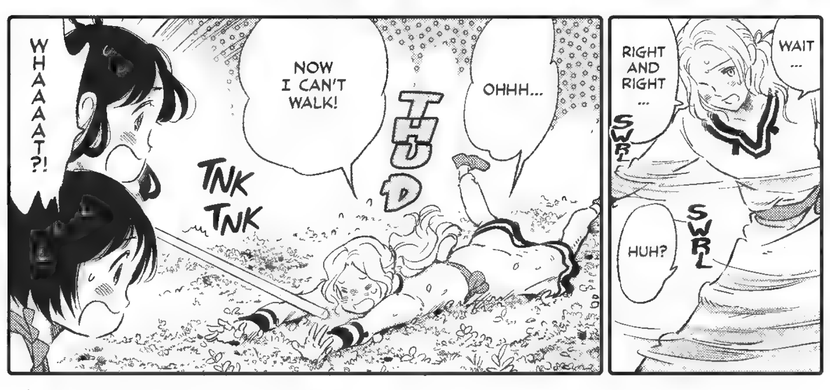
GAH!

THONK THONK

FWSH SWSH

SIGH





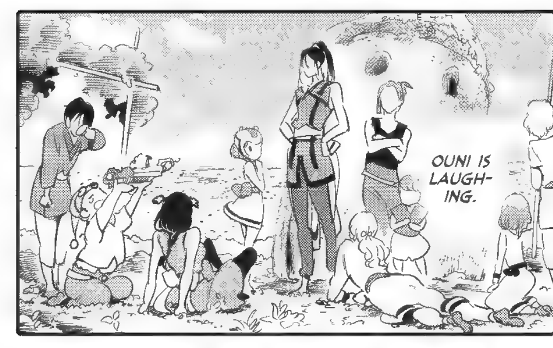

TROMP TROMP
RIGHT! LEFT! RIGHT LEFT LEFT RIGHT RIGHT LEFT LEFT RIGHT LEFT LEFT LEFT...
TROMP
TROMP
TROM
TROM
RIGHT, LEFT!
LOOK.
THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE.
THE NEWEST AND BEST TO COME FROM OUR WORK-SHOP!
GYAAK, THE THYMIA SHOOTER!!
...
CRASH
THUD
YOU FELL OVER TOO?
NOW OUNI'S AN-NOYED.
SEE, WHAT DID I TELL YOU ...?
THUD
HEY, OUNI.
RIGHT ?!
SHUP
IT'S A WASTE OF OUNI'S TIME TO WORK WITH PEOPLE LIKE YOU.
WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?!

HEH HEH

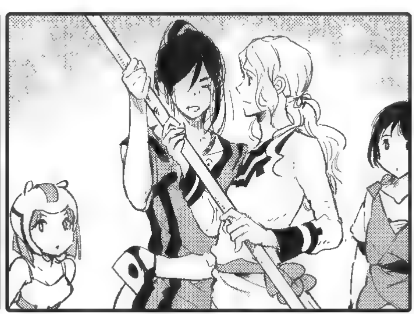
AH HA HA HA HA!

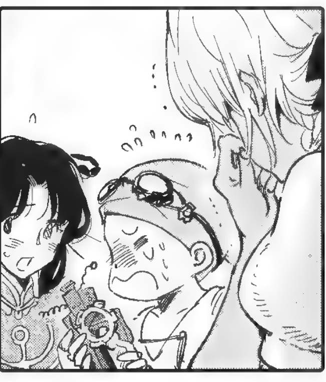





OUNI IS
LAUGH-
ING.



YAA!
Ugh, don't get so close.


HMMM?



HEE HEE


LYKOS TOO.


I HEAR LAUGHTER COMING FROM ALL OVER THE MUD WHALE.


YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE, RO...
Who's still frowning.
THAT'S RIGHT, YOU'VE FALLEN BEHIND LYKOS AND OUNI.
HUH... WAIT...
TUG
!


LOOK!
It...

...appeared out of nowhere.

GRAAAAH

HOW DOES AN ISLAND GET SO CLOSE OUT OF NOWHERE?!

...

WHAT ...?

NO WAY...

WHOOO

...THIS ISN'T...

WHOO

IT'S GETTING CLOSER...


WH...
WOOO
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
FLAP
WE'RE GOING TO CRASH!

HURRY, SING THE STEERING PRAYER!
WOOO
NO, IT'S TOO LATE!
IT CAN'T BE...
...THE EMPIRE!
GASP
GRAAAH
AHH!
...


THE MUD WHALE?!
OH!
OH!



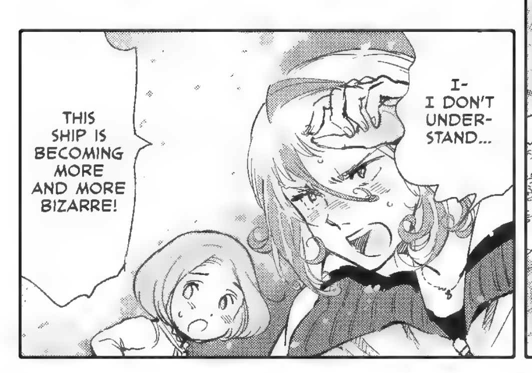





...?
YOU...
YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?!

OHH...
THE BOWS ARE OVER-LAPPING.
THE FIELDS ARE BLENDING.




I- I DON'T UNDER-STAND...
THIS SHIP IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE BIZARRE!


TRYING TO UNDER-STAND MAY WELL BE FUTILE.

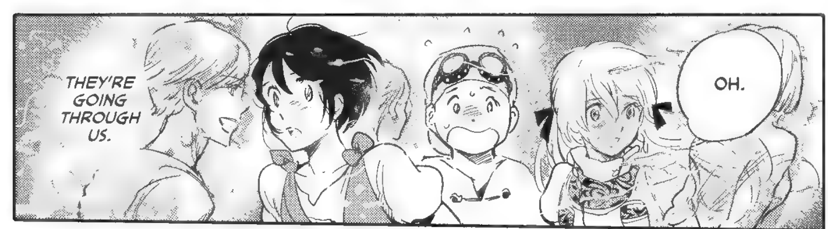

AS LONG AS WE ARE ON THIS SHIP OF UPSET FORTUNES...
...WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO BE PREPARED FOR THE MYSTERIOUS AND THE ABSURD.


LOOK.


THERE ARE PEOPLE ON THAT MUD WHALE.



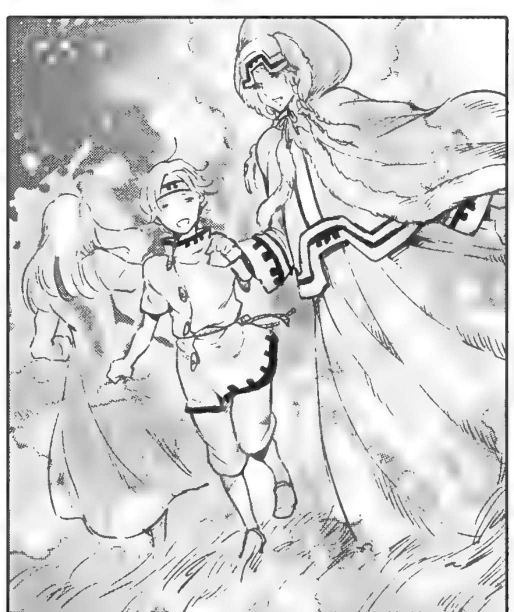



OH.
THEY'RE GOING THROUGH US.


THEY'RE LIKE GHOSTS.


THEY **ARE** GHOSTS.

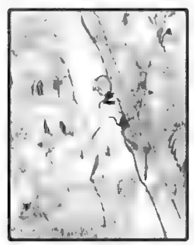
IT'S A
GHOSTLY
MUD
WHALE.



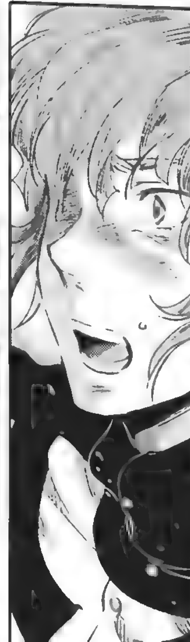


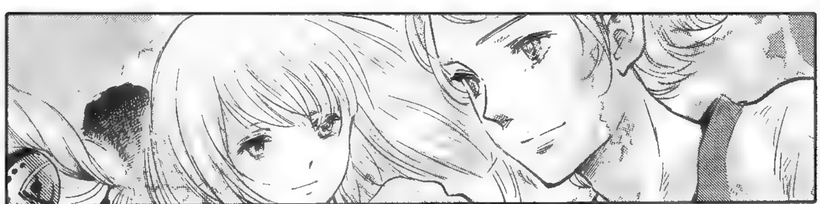


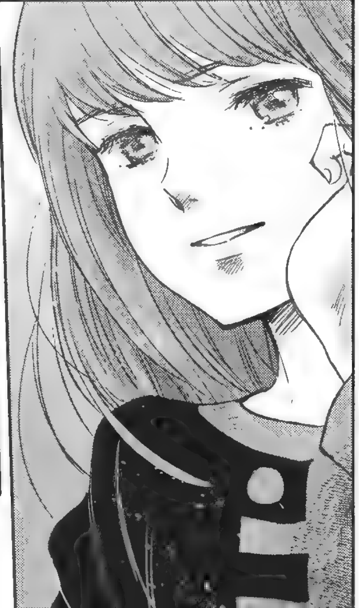




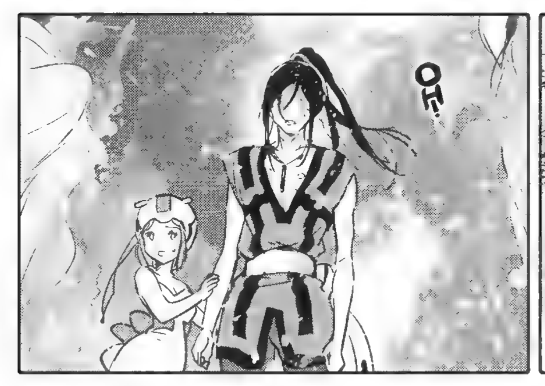
DAMN ...
WHAT'S GOING ON...?


MAYOR TAISHA...




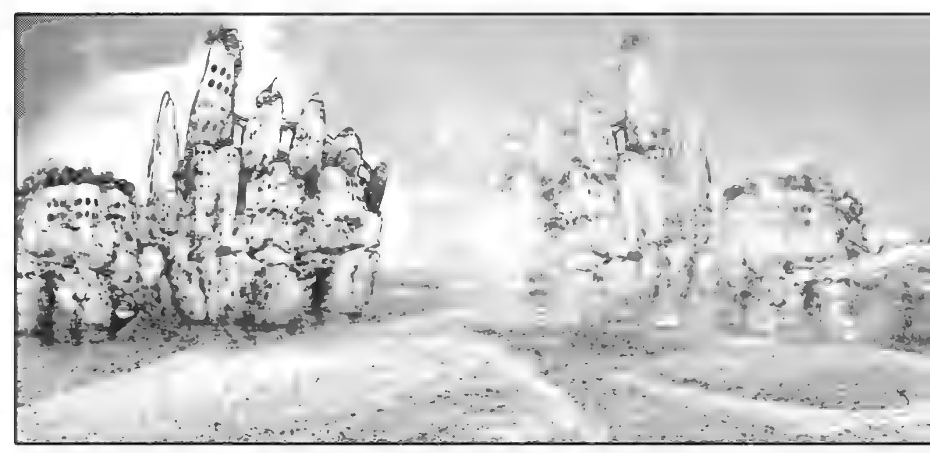




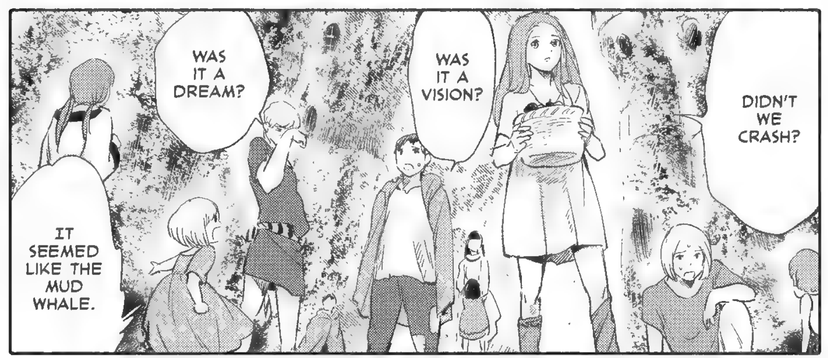


OH!





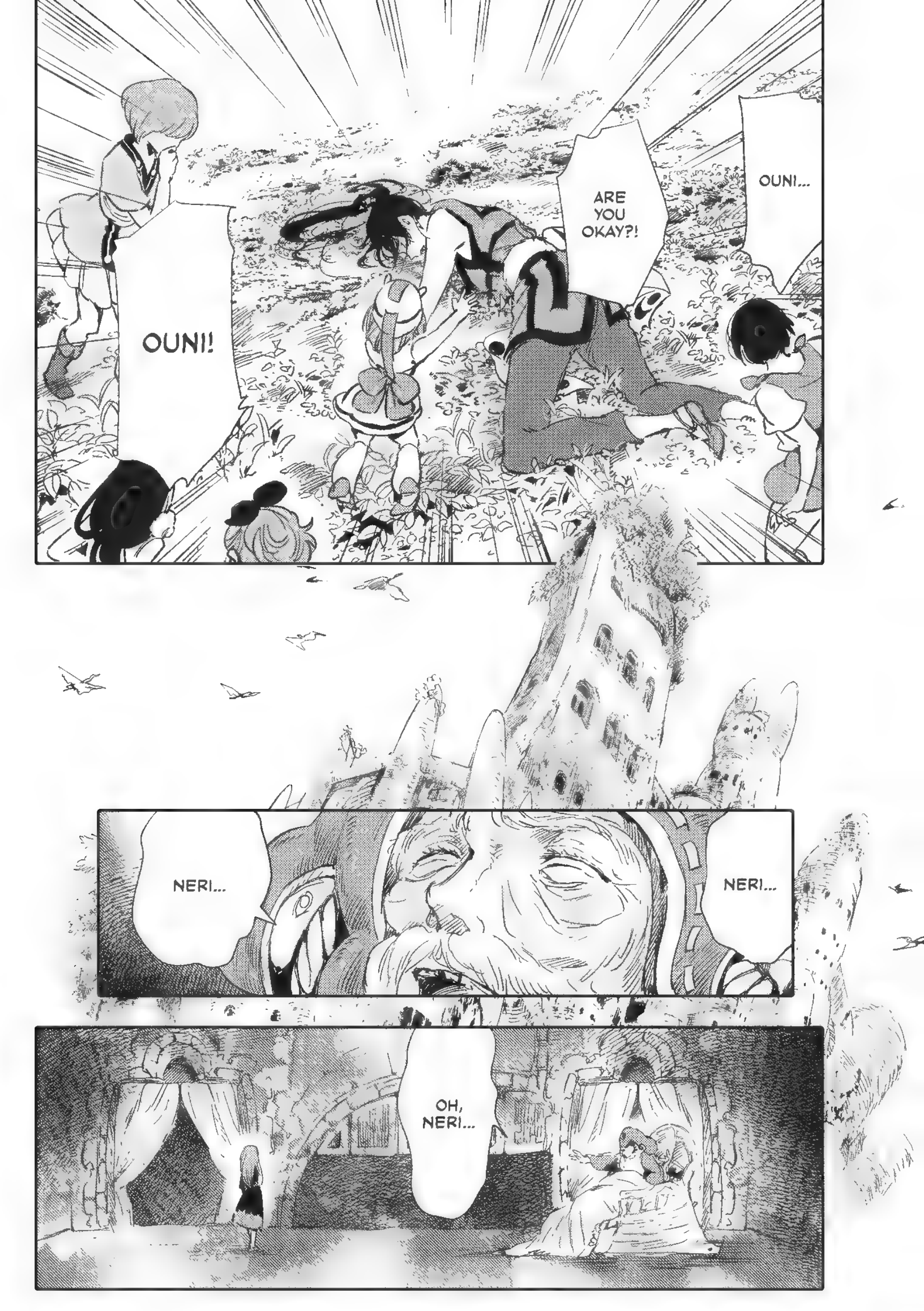

ZSSH


DIDN'T WE CRASH?
WAS IT A VISION?
WAS IT A DREAM?
IT SEEMED LIKE THE MUD WHALE.


WHAT WAS THAT?
WHERE DID THEY GO?
THERE WERE LOTS OF GHOSTS.
I'M SCARED!


STAGGER
SIR ROCHALÍZO LOOKS LIKE A GHOST!


OUNI!

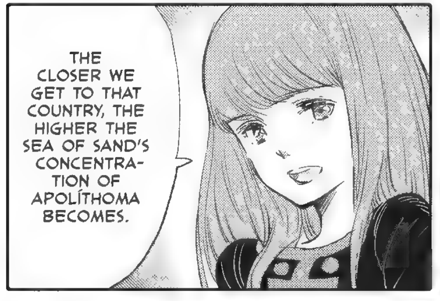

OUNI...
ARE YOU OKAY?!
OUNI!
NERI...
NERI...
OH, NERI...

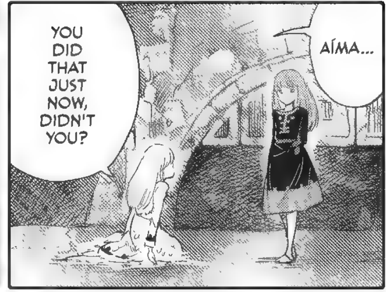

I'M AÍMA.

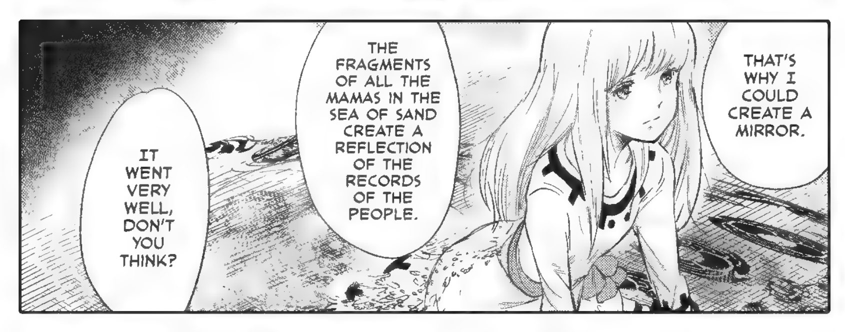

SHE'S REALLY AÍMA TOO.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO NAMED HER NERI.


OH...

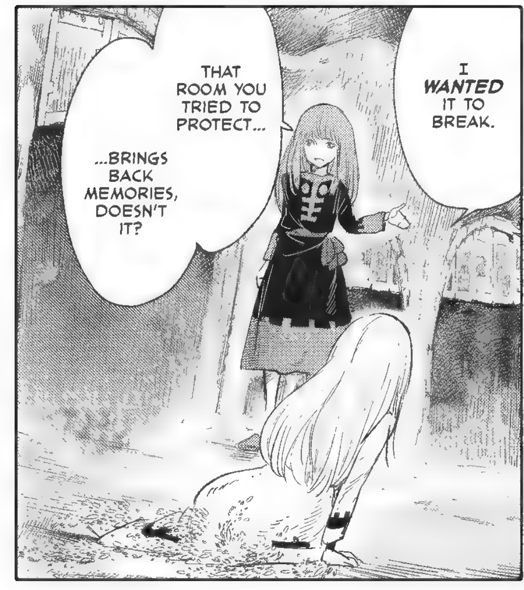

YOU'VE REGAINED YOUR STRENGTH.


THE CLOSER WE GET TO THAT COUNTRY, THE HIGHER THE SEA OF SAND'S CONCENTRATION OF APOLÍTHOMA BECOMES.


AÍMA...
YOU DID THAT JUST NOW, DIDN'T YOU?


THAT'S WHY I COULD CREATE A MIRROR.
THE FRAGMENTS OF ALL THE MAMAS IN THE SEA OF SAND CREATE A REFLECTION OF THE RECORDS OF THE PEOPLE.
IT WENT VERY WELL, DON'T YOU THINK?

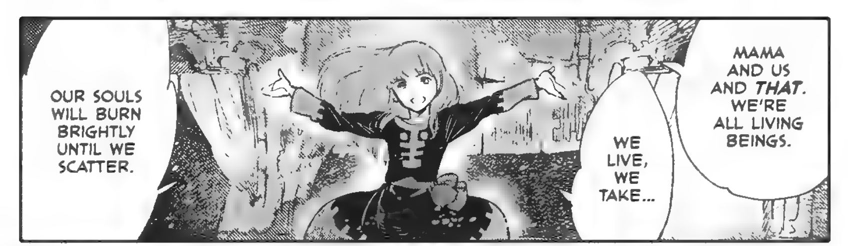

BUT THE LOCK TO THAT ROOM HAS BEEN BROKEN.


I *WANTED* IT TO BREAK.
THAT ROOM YOU TRIED TO PROTECT...
...BRINGS BACK MEMORIES, DOESN'T IT?

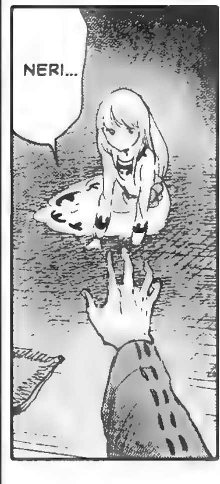

YOU SILLY!
HEE HEE


WHAT ARE YOU SCHEMING?


I'M NOT SCHEMING ANYTHING ...
I JUST WANT TO LIVE.


MAMA AND US AND *THAT*. WE'RE ALL LIVING BEINGS.
WE LIVE, WE TAKE...
OUR SOULS WILL BURN BRIGHTLY UNTIL WE SCATTER.




NERI...

BYAKUROKU ...


OUNI...
OUNI, WHAT HAP-PENED TO YOU?
HE LOOKS LIKE HE'S IN PAIN.
THIS MARK...
IS IT AURA...?
HE'S GLOWING...
KA-THUNK
CRASH
BANG
PLEASE DON'T.
IF YOU MOVE SUDDENLY IN YOUR CONDITION...


WOBBLE

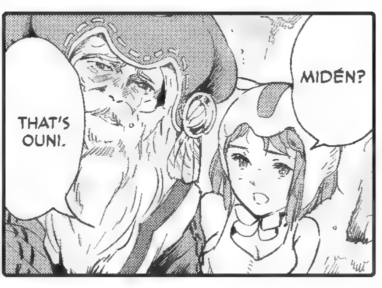

ELDEST ?!


ELDEST, YOU CAN WALK?
HE HASN'T MOVED ON HIS OWN IN A LONG TIME.

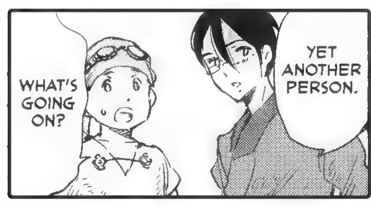

AFTER THE GHOST MUD WHALE...
...HE SEEMS TO HAVE RETURNED TO HIMSELF.

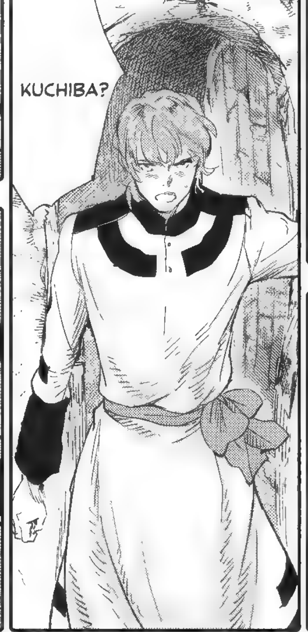

THUD


MIDÉN...
MIDÉN...!


STOP IT.
DON'T BE ROUGH WITH HIM.

MIDÉN?
THAT'S OUNI.

MIDÉN? WHO'S THAT?

WE NEED TO SAVE MIDÉN.
IT'S NOT *MIDÉN'S* FAULT.

YET ANOTHER PERSON.
WHAT'S GOING ON?

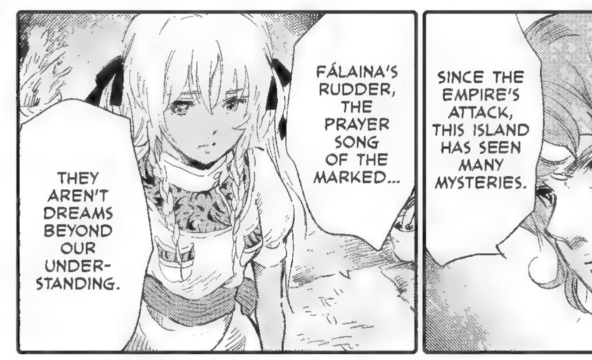

KUCHIBA?

DASH
DASH

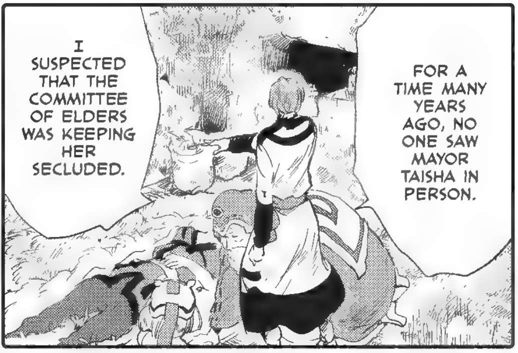
BYAKU-ROKU, SIR...!
WHAM


WHAT WAS THAT?
WHAT WAS MAYOR TAISHA FORCED TO DO?!


I SAW AN IMAGE.
SINCE THE EMPIRE'S ATTACK, THIS ISLAND HAS SEEN MANY MYSTERIES.


FÁLAINA'S RUDDER, THE PRAYER SONG OF THE MARKED...
THEY AREN'T DREAMS BEYOND OUR UNDER-STANDING.

THIS MAYOR TAISHA WASN'T JUST A HALLUCINA-TION.
THAT WAS HER FROM MANY YEARS AGO.
IT WAS A TRUTH FROM THE PAST!

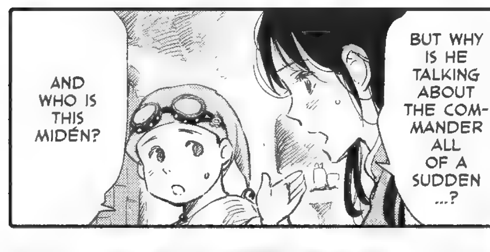

FOR A TIME MANY YEARS AGO, NO ONE SAW MAYOR TAISHA IN PERSON.
I SUSPECTED THAT THE COMMITTEE OF ELDERS WAS KEEPING HER SECLUDED.


I THOUGHT PERHAPS IT WAS FOR A SECRET RITUAL.
WHAT WAS...?


IT WILL BE CLEAR IF YOU GO TO THAT ROOM...
MIDÉN'S ROOM.
THAT'S RIGHT, WE CAN START OVER FROM THERE.

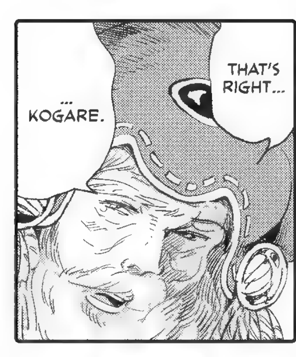

WE CAN SAVE MIDÉN AND SHUAN.
?


SHUAN?
I GUESS HE MEANS THE HEAD OF THE VIGI-LANTE CORPS.


BUT WHY IS HE TALKING ABOUT THE COM-MANDER ALL OF A SUDDEN ...?
AND WHO IS THIS MIDÉN?




ELDEST...
IF WE GO TO THAT ROOM...
...CAN WE CURE OUNI?


THAT'S RIGHT...
... KOGARE.


HE'S GOT ME AND GRAND-PA CON-FUSED.


BUT HIS EYES ARE CLEAR.


I WANT YOU TO OPEN THE ROOM AND RECORD EVERYTHING.
AND... MIDÉN... SAVE HIM.


ELDEST!
WOBBLE



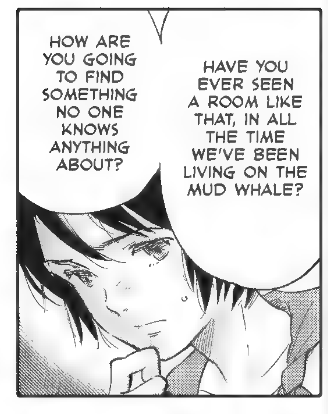




An Encounter -The End-

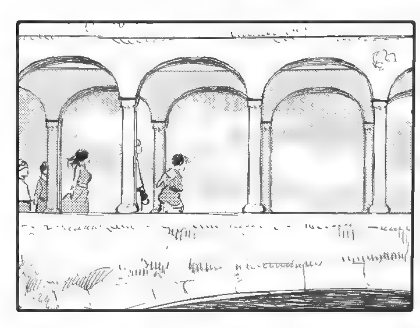

Chapter 26
The Mud Maze

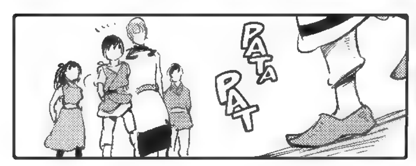

HOW ARE YOU GOING...
...TO FIND MIDÉN'S ROOM, CHAKURO?


HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A ROOM LIKE THAT, IN ALL THE TIME WE'VE BEEN LIVING ON THE MUD WHALE?
HOW ARE YOU GOING TO FIND SOMETHING NO ONE KNOWS ANYTHING ABOUT?


BESIDES, WHAT'S WITH THE ROOM BEING THE KEY TO CURING OUNI?


SHUP
WE HAVE TO ASK THE ELDEST AGAIN.

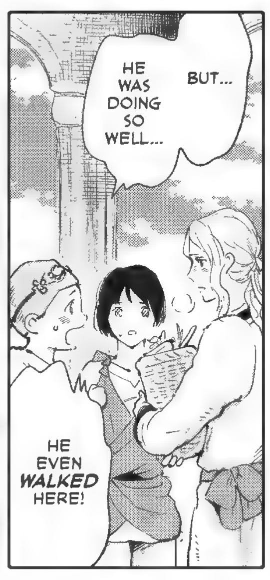



PATA
PAT

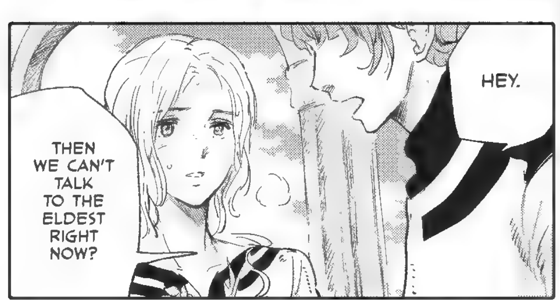

PATA
OH, SUOU.


IT'S AN EMERGENCY ...
THE ELDEST HAS LOST CONSCIOUSNESS!


WHAAAT?


BUT...
HE WAS DOING SO WELL...
HE EVEN *WALKED* HERE!

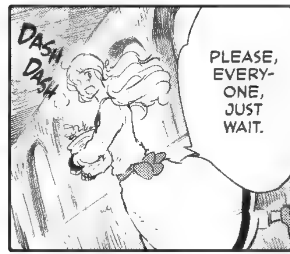

THE COMMITTEE OF ELDERS INFORMED ME...
...THAT HE'S TAKEN A SUDDEN TURN FOR THE WORSE, AND I'M BRINGING HIM MEDICINE.


HEY.
THEN WE CAN'T TALK TO THE ELDEST RIGHT NOW?

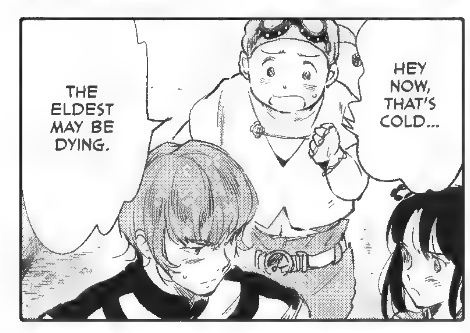

THE COMMITTEE OF ELDERS IS SAYING NO ONE BUT I CAN SEE HIM NOW, AND WE NEED TO BE READY FOR THE WORST.


DOES THAT MEAN HE'S ON HIS DEATH-BED?


OH NO...
I HEARD THE ELDEST IS THE SAME AGE AS THE MUD WHALE.


PLEASE, EVERY-ONE, JUST WAIT.
DASH DASH


DAMN...
AT SUCH A CRUCIAL TIME TOO...!
FWOK


HEY NOW, THAT'S COLD...
THE ELDEST MAY BE DYING.


NO...
NEZU, EVERYBODY ...





KUCHIBA, CAN YOU THINK OF *ANYTHING* ABOUT A HIDDEN ROOM?

...

ACTUALLY...

?

I SAW MAYOR TAISHA IN A STRANGE ROOM...

...ON THE GHOSTLY MUD WHALE.

BUT WASN'T THE GHOST SHIP JUST A PHANTOM?

NO.


SEEING THE GHOST SHIP BROUGHT OLD MEMORIES BACK TO THE ELDEST.
THAT GHOST SHIP WAS SHOWING US THE PAST.
IF WE START OVER FROM THAT ROOM, IT WILL ALL BE CLEAR.
THEN WE CAN SAVE OUNI...
I'M SURE THAT SCENE YOU SAW WAS REAL, KUCHIBA.


IF MAYOR TAISHA WAS ALIVE, WE WOULD KNOW...

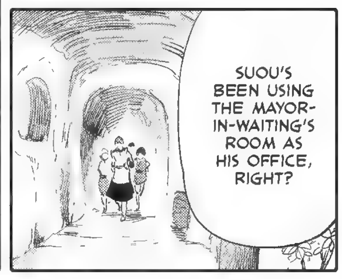

...
THE DIARIES.
OH!

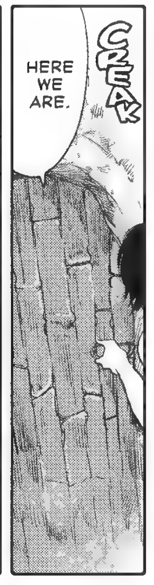

IF THERE IS A RECORD OF THE MYSTERIOUS TIME WHEN MAYOR TAISHA DISAPPEARED...
...IT WILL BE IN THE DIARIES IN THE MAYOR'S ROOM...


DIARIES?


THE MAYOR IS REQUIRED TO KEEP A DAILY LOG.


YES.
MAYOR TAISHA'S OFFICE HAS BEEN LEFT JUST AS IT WAS.


SUOU'S BEEN USING THE MAYOR-IN-WAITING'S ROOM AS HIS OFFICE, RIGHT?


CREAK
HERE WE ARE.


IT HASN'T BEEN TOUCHED SINCE THE ATTACK.
HER ADVISERS HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO BRING THEMSELVES TO CLEAR IT OUT YET.


WANDER
WHERE ARE THE MAYORAL DIARIES?


HERE.


WOW, THERE ARE SO MANY!
OKAY, LET'S LOOK FOR A REFERENCE TO MIDÉN'S ROOM...
PINCH
WHAT ARE YOU DOING ?!
OUCH
ARE YOU PLANNING TO READ MAYOR TAISHA'S DIARIES WITHOUT PERMISSION?
HUH?
BUT...
NO IFS OR BUTS...
THIS IS NOT FOR YOU BRATS.
THEN YOU READ IT, KUCHIBA.
...
SHAKE
SHAKE
N-NO, I CAN'T. I-IT'S NOT POSSIBLE.


THERE'S NO WAY THE LIKES OF ME...
...CAN READ MAYOR TAISHA'S SACRED DIARY...!
WHAAAT ?!

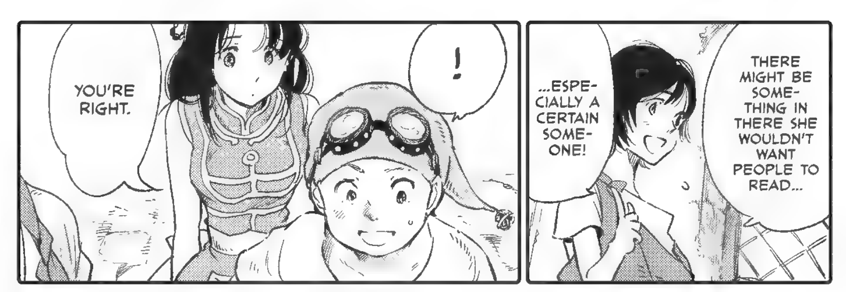

THEN NO ONE CAN READ THEM!


THAT'S RIGHT, NO ONE SHOULD READ THEM.


WOW, WHAT A PAIN.
THEN WHY DID WE COME HERE?
WE THOUGHT HE WOULD HELP US, BUT HE'S TURNED INTO THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE.


...


YOU'RE RIGHT.
CLENCH
WE CAN'T JUST READ THEM.


THERE MIGHT BE SOME-THING IN THERE SHE WOULDN'T WANT PEOPLE TO READ...
...ESPE-CIALLY A CERTAIN SOME-ONE!
!
YOU'RE RIGHT.


SHE MIGHT HAVE WRITTEN SOME-THING LIKE...
..."I CAN REALLY RELY ON KUCHIBA, AND HIS UPTURNED, GLARING EYES ARE SO COOL.♡"
THAT'S RIGHT.
YEAH, SHE DEFINITELY WOULDN'T WANT THE PERSON SHE WROTE ABOUT READING THAT.
LET'S PUT THEM AWAY.


NO, CHAKKI...
...YOU HAVE TO MAKE HIM REA—
SHH.
...
NO...
...IN ORDER TO SOLVE THIS MYSTERY...
GULP


IT'S...
...OPEN SEASON!!
FWOP
HE'S SO SIMPLE.

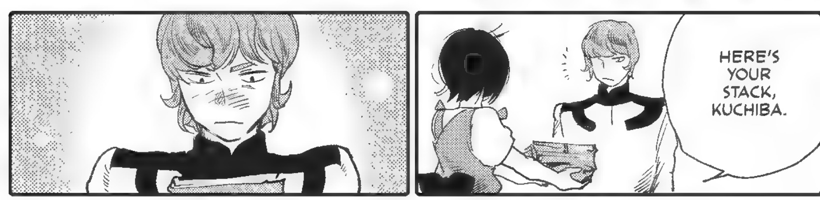

OKAY.
LET'S DIVVY THEM UP.


SHUP SHUP
HEY!


THOSE ARE PRECIOUS!


I PROMISE...
...THEY'LL BE PUT BACK THE WAY THEY WERE.
YOU CAN TRUST ME TO MANAGE THE ARCHIVES.

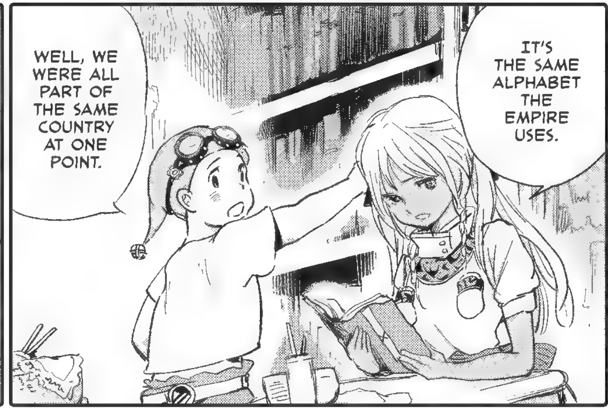
I THINK MAYOR TAISHA DISAPPEARED 15 OR 16 YEARS AGO.
IT WAS ONLY A YEAR OR SO INTO HER TERM.
NONE OF THE REST OF IT IS RELEVANT, SO DON'T READ THOSE.
GOT IT.





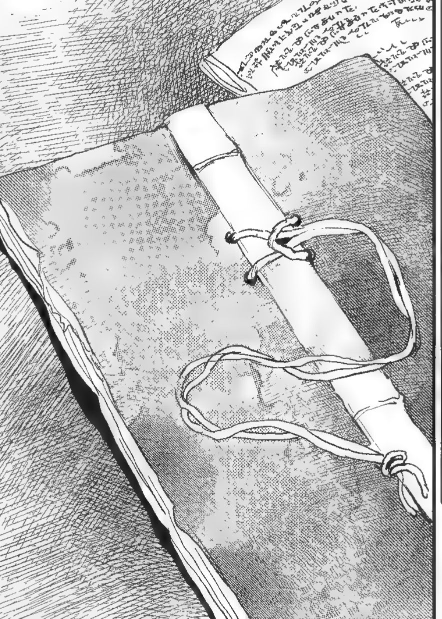



FLIP FLIP


IT'S THE SAME ALPHABET THE EMPIRE USES.
WELL, WE WERE ALL PART OF THE SAME COUNTRY AT ONE POINT.


DID YOU FIND SOMETHING ABOUT THE ROOM?


OHHH !!

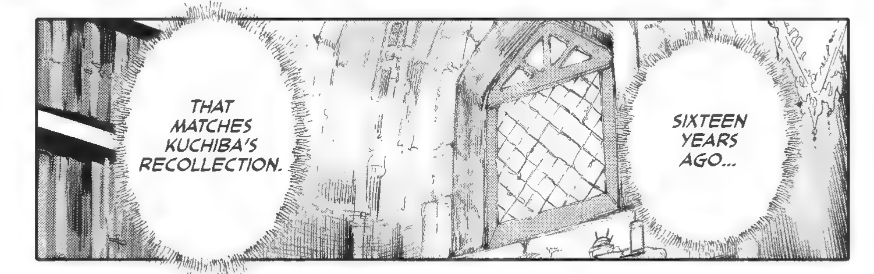



I CAN'T READ!
NEVER MIND, JUST HAVE A REST, MISS GINSHU.


Mayor Taisha's diaries were concise and matter-of-fact.
They mainly dealt with the weather, her duties and the state of the citizens of the Mud Whale.
Since we weren't allowed to show emotion on the Mud Whale...
...that was to be expected.
THERE'S NO WAY SHE WROTE ABOUT KUCHIBA.
SORRY ABOUT THAT.
CHA-KURO...
...THERE ARE A FEW DAYS MISSING HERE.
MAYBE SHE JUST SKIPPED A FEW DAYS.
SHE'S NOT LIKE YOU, NEZU...
THERE AREN'T ANY MISSING DAYS ANY-WHERE ELSE.
WAIT...
KUCHIBA THINKS SHE WAS HELD SOMEWHERE FOR A FEW DAYS.


IN MIDÉN'S ROOM, I GUESS.
MAYBE THOSE ARE THE MISSING DAYS.

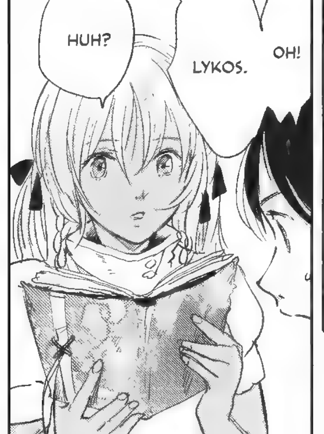

IT'S A FEW DAYS IN MONTH 11 OF THE YEAR 77 OF THE SAND EXILE...


SIXTEEN YEARS AGO...
THAT MATCHES KUCHIBA'S RECOLLECTION.


WHEN DID THE DIARY RESUME?
IS THERE ANY MENTION OF THE ROOM?


IT JUST GOES BACK TO THE WEATHER AND HER DUTIES...
...AS IF NOTHING HAPPENED.


I SEE...
NO CLUES.


OH!
LYKOS.
HUH?


THERE'S SOMETHING STUCK IN THE SPINE.
IT'S THIN BUT...
...THERE ARE SEVERAL SHEETS.
GLUE?
NO, IT'S HELD TOGETHER WITH MUD.
YOU FOUND A HIDDEN NOTE!
NO WONDER YOU'RE THE ARCHIVIST!
It was...
DROOP
...the key we were looking for.
A record of the days Mayor Taisha spent in the mysterious room.


KUCHIBA ...
PAF
WE FOUND IT! I'M SURE THIS IS IT!


!


THERE WASN'T ANYTHING ABOUT HIM IN THE DIARIES.
NEVER MIND, KUCCHI!


...
IT ENDS THE DAY BEFORE THE ATTACK.


OH.
I GAVE HIM THE MOST RECENT DIARY.
UM...
I'M SORRY, KUCHIBA.


PAF
IT WAS ALL ABOUT HER DUTIES AND THE CITIZENS UNTIL THE VERY END.


EVEN IF SHE DIDN'T WRITE DOWN ANY OF HER FEELINGS...
...I CAN TELL HOW MUCH SHE CARED FOR EVERYONE.

I'M GOING TO EXPOSE IT...
NOT JUST FOR OUNI'S SAKE, BUT FOR EVERYONE.
I'M DONE GETTING MESSED ABOUT BY THE SECRETS ON THIS ISLAND.

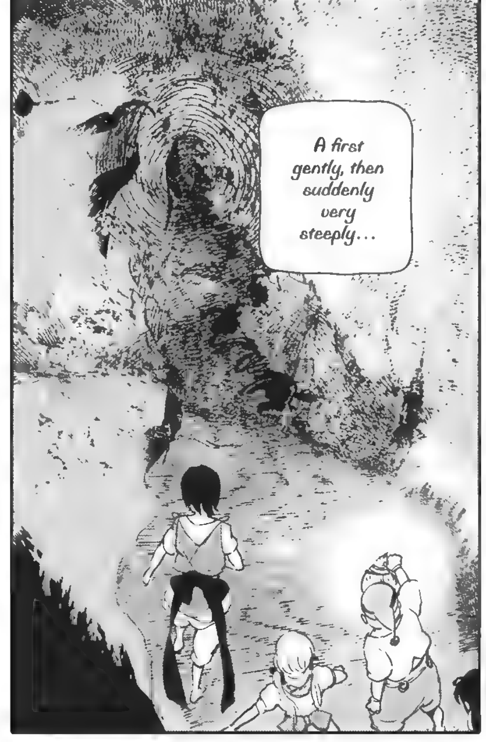

We began looking for Midén's room...
...based on the information from Mayor Taisha's secret diary.
SHE MENTIONS THE ENTRANCE ...
I heard about the door...
...from Hakuji, who has just joined the Committee of Elders.
At the foot of Tower 2, beyond the kamuta bushes...
...is a round door covered in sand.

YANK
CREAK
THE SAND IS MAKING IT HARD TO OPEN...
The passage inside is knee-deep in sand.
It would have been better to go in my bare feet.

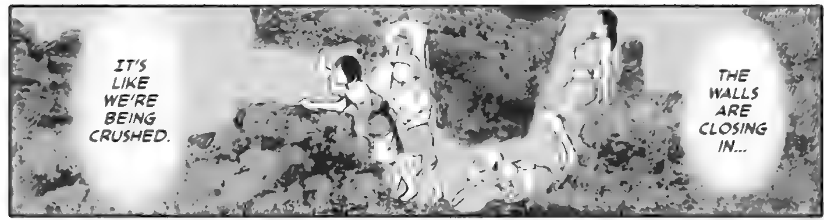
















I WONDER WHO BUILT THIS MAZE?

IT LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE WAS KNEADING AND PLAYING WITH THE MUD OF THE WALLS.

OH!

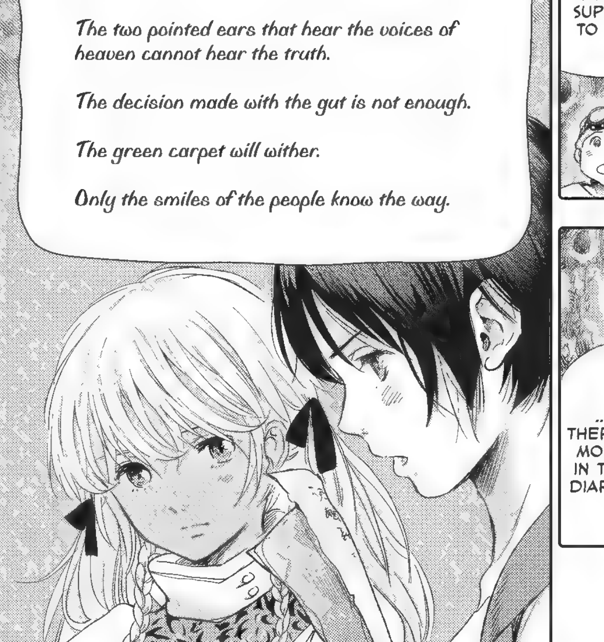
IT'S A CROSS-ROADS!

Hakuji says there is only one way to get there.

He told me, "If you get it wrong, you'll be trapped down there in the walls."








IT'S A SAND POEM.
DID MAYOR TAISHA WRITE IT?


WHY DID SHE PUT IT IN THE DIARY?
HMM, IT'S PART OF THE MAYOR'S DUTY TO WRITE POETRY...
THIS ONE IS MOST DEFINITELY A HINT ABOUT THE CROSSROADS.


"ONLY THE SMILES OF THE PEOPLE KNOW THE WAY"...
WE JUST NEED TO PICK THAT DOOR, RIGHT?
I'M NOT SEEING ANY SMILES.
THEY ALL LOOK THE SAME TO ME.


BUT THEY ALL SEEM TO BE SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT SIZES...
THE ONE ON THE LEFT END IS THE LARGEST.
THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR SOMEHOW...
I'VE GOT IT!

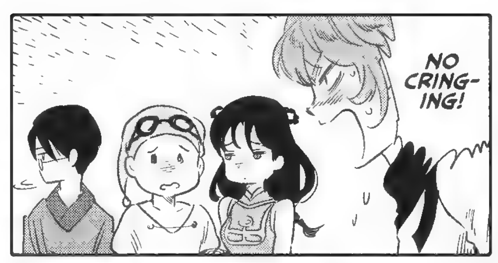

IT'S THE FIVE TOWERS OF THE MUD WHALE!
OH!
"EVEN THE HIGHEST HAWK CANNOT SEE."
"THE TWO POINTED EARS THAT HEAR THE VOICES OF HEAVEN CANNOT HEAR THE TRUTH."
THAT'S TOWER 2, WITH THE TWO HORNS.
THE CENTRAL TOWER IS THE HIGHEST...
...SO THAT MUST BE THE BIG ONE ON THE LEFT.
"THE DECISION MADE WITH THE GUT IS NOT ENOUGH." THAT'S TOWER 3, IN THE MIDDLE HERE.
"THE GREEN CARPET WILL WITHER." THAT'S THE MOSSY TOWER 5.
"ONLY THE SMILES OF THE PEOPLE KNOW THE WAY."
THAT'S TOWER 4, WITH THE WALL OF FACES.
TOWER 4 IS FOURTH FROM THE LEFT, SO...
THIS IS THE DOOR WE NEED TO CHOOSE.
OKAY!


CREAK
THIS IS WHAT THE DIARY SAYS...
There are two crossroads.

WE'RE HERE.
IT'S THE SECOND CROSS-ROADS.
THIS TIME THERE ARE TWO DOORS.
WHAT'S THE HINT FOR THIS ONE?
The one that moves when you laugh.
...IT SAYS.
THAT'S IT?
THAT'S WAY TOO SIMPLE...
...FOR MAYOR TAISHA.

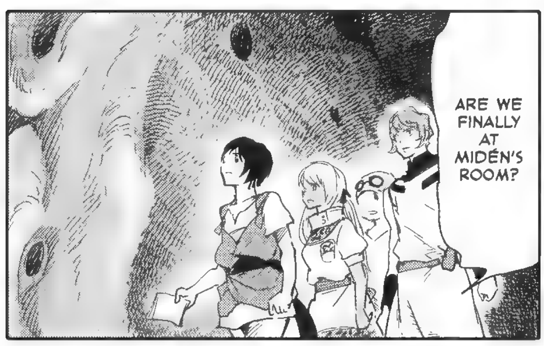

THERE ARE ONLY TWO CHOICES, BUT THIS ONE'S HARD...
WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING!
THESE DOORS ARE BOTH DELIBERATELY PAINTED BLACK...
IT LOOKS LIKE KNOTWEED INK.
BLACK CIRCLES ...
THIS REPRESENTS MAYOR TAISHA'S FACE.
THE ROUND BLACK DOORS ARE HER TWO MOLES.
THE ONE THAT MOVES WHEN SHE LAUGHS IS THE ONE BY HER MOUTH.
I'VE GOT IT!
REALLY, KUCHIBA?
IT'S THE LOWER-LEFT DOOR AS YOU FACE THEM!


MOLE... I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU GOT THAT...
WAY TO GO, KUCCHI!
I KNOW EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT MAYOR TAISHA.
CLENCH


NO CRING-ING!

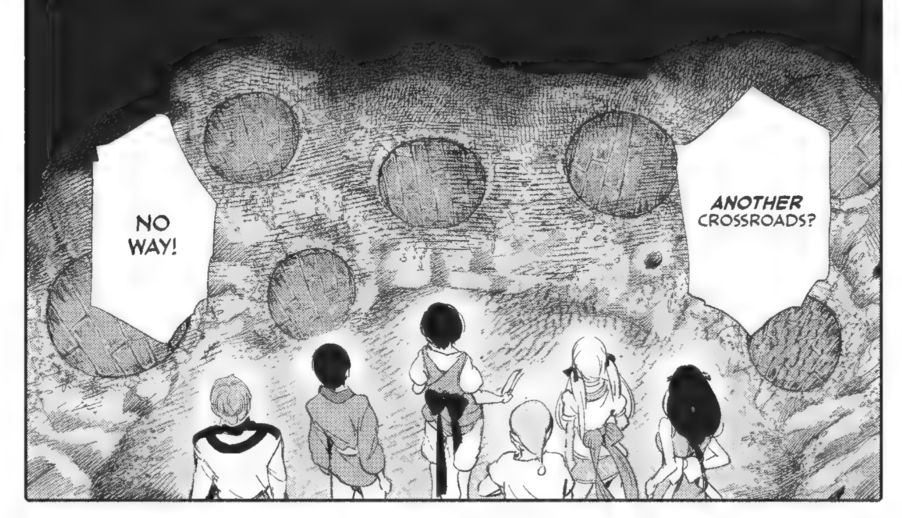

CREAK
LET'S GO.
OKAY...
THERE ARE ONLY TWO CROSSROADS, SO NOW WE JUST HAVE TO KEEP GOING.


ZSSH
ZSSH


ARE WE FINALLY AT MIDÉN'S ROOM?


IT'S OPEN UP AHEAD.

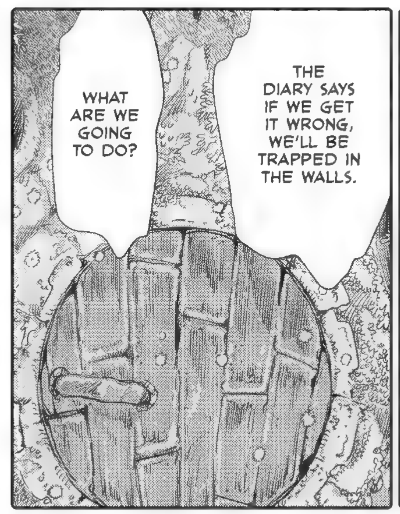

WHAT ?!

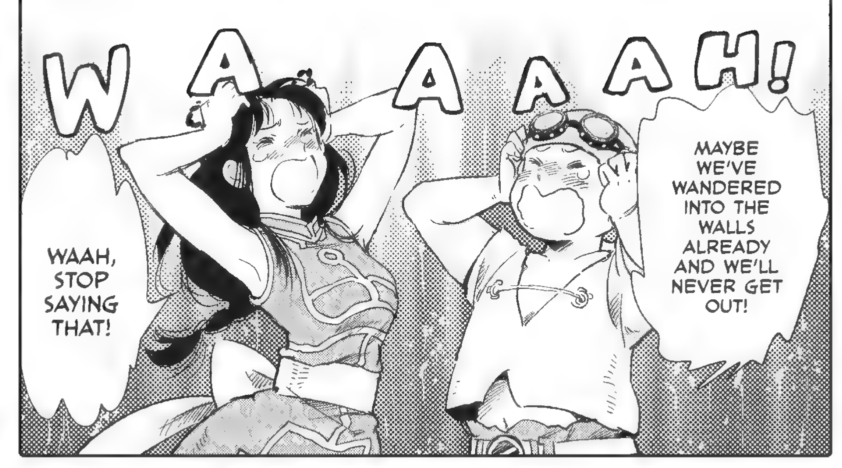

ANOTHER CROSSROADS?
NO WAY!


AND THERE'S A BOAT-LOAD OF DOORS.


I THOUGHT THERE WERE ONLY TWO CROSSROADS.
YEAH, THERE AREN'T ANY HINTS EITHER.

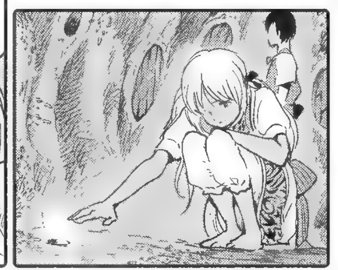

THEN MAYBE YOUR DEDUCTION BACK THERE WAS WRONG...
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?


THE DIARY SAYS IF WE GET IT WRONG, WE'LL BE TRAPPED IN THE WALLS.
WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?


WAAAAH!
MAYBE WE'VE WANDERED INTO THE WALLS ALREADY AND WE'LL NEVER GET OUT!
WAAH, STOP SAYING THAT!


OH!
I WONDER WHAT THIS IS?
LYKOS, LET ME...
...SEE THAT.



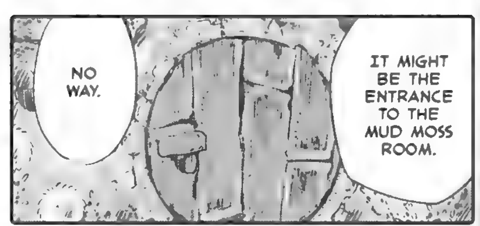



I'VE SEEN THIS SOMEWHERE BEFORE.

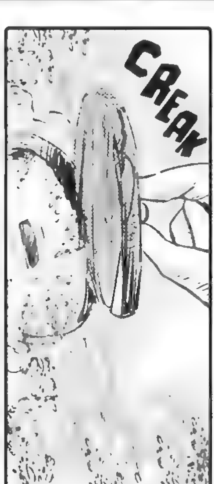

IT LOOKS LIKE OUNI'S NECKLACE.


CHAKURO, OVER HERE.







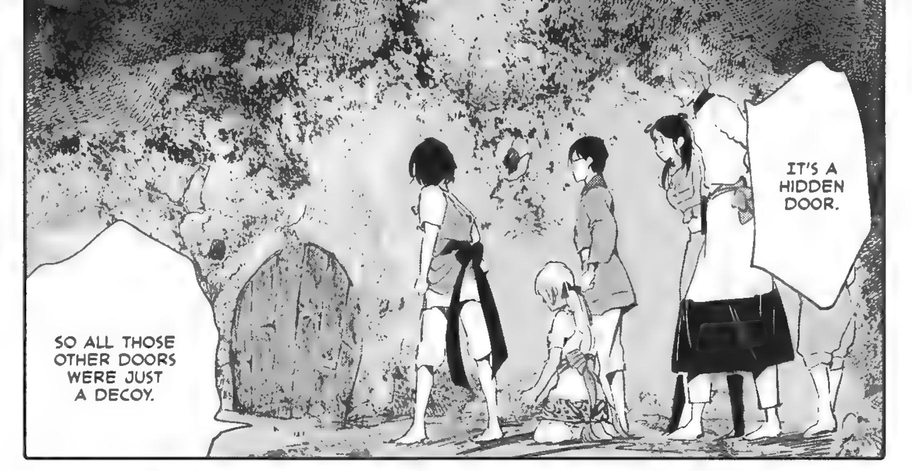




ZSSSSH

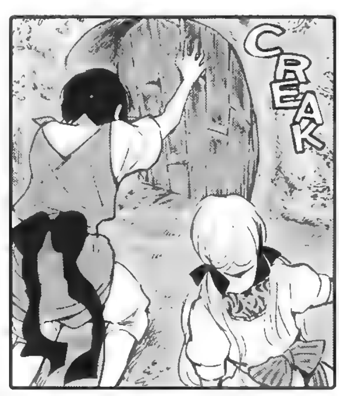
WHOA!

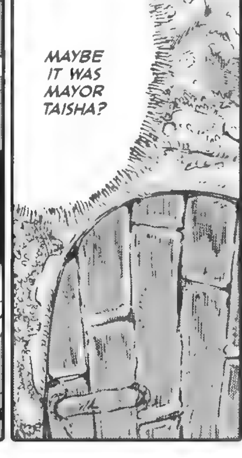
The wall fell off!


IT'S A HIDDEN DOOR.
SO ALL THOSE OTHER DOORS WERE JUST A DECOY.

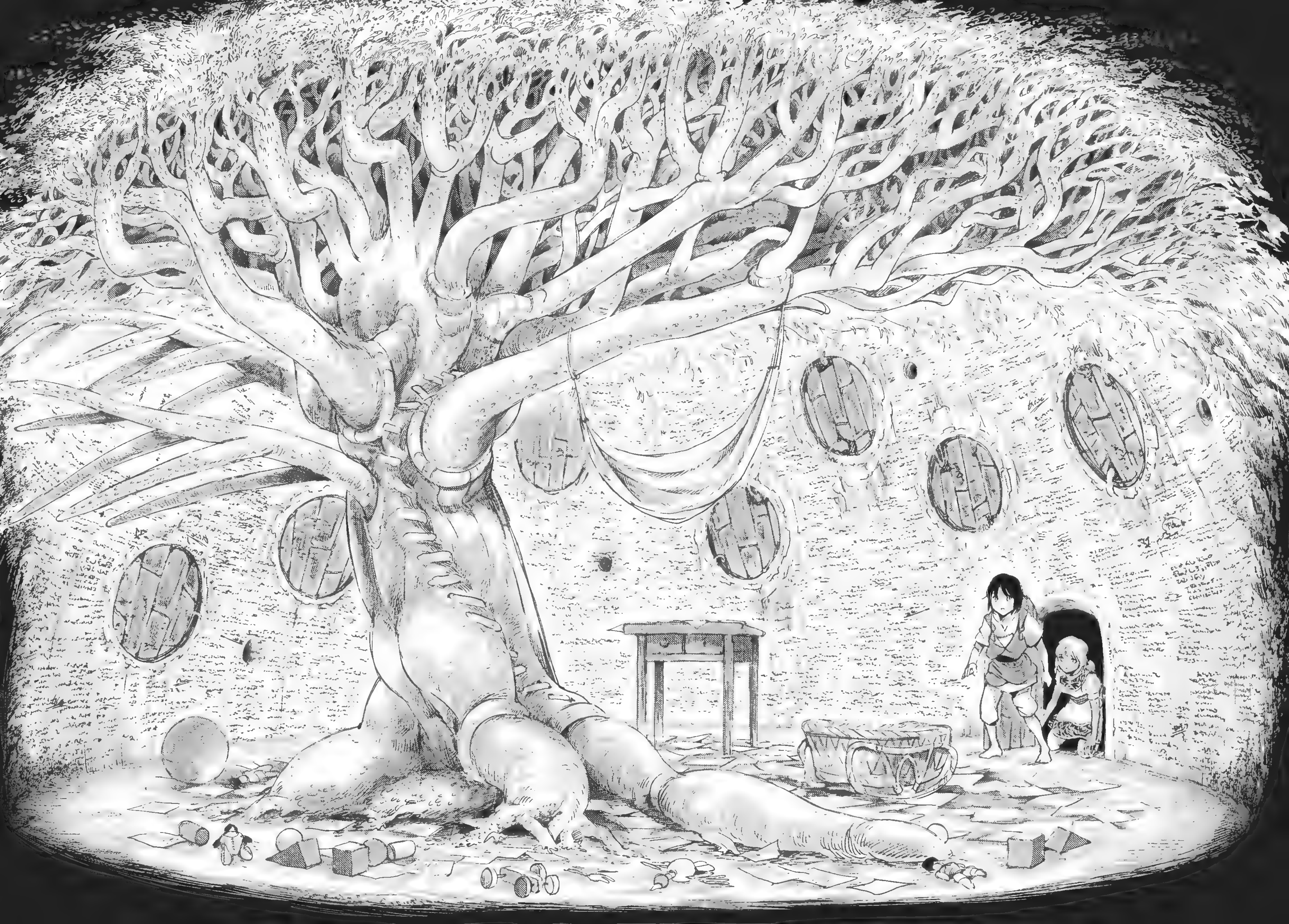

I WONDER WHO KINDLY LEFT THIS KEY THERE?


GULP


CREAK


MAYBE IT WAS MAYOR TAISHA?





W-
WHOA.
WHAT AN ODD ROOM.
IS THIS MIDÉN'S ROOM?
IT'S LIKE A CHILD'S ROOM.
LOOK.
THERE'S WRITING ALL OVER THE WALLS.


Where there are words...
...there are people's thoughts.
ARE YOU OKAY, CHAKURO?
Because of my hyper-graphia...
...I became drunk on the glut of stories in the room.
GASP



The Mud Maze -The End-

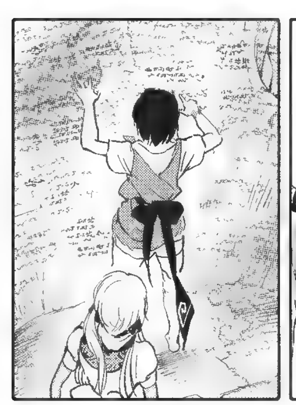

Chapter 27
A Birth






WHO WROTE THIS?
IT'S KIND OF CREEPY.


IT'S IN MULTIPLE HANDS, ALL INTERMIN-GLED.
SO A LOT OF PEOPLE WROTE IT THEN.




CHAKURO, ARE YOU OKAY?
DON'T PUSH YOURSELF TO KEEP READING IF YOU DON'T FEEL WELL.
CHAKURO.
I was completely absorbed, tracing the written record of someone's life on that wall.
The record started in a town I had never heard of.


...
My sisters were like little squirrels, jumping across the lead-gray roofs of this cold town.
They made their living stealing sárka from the mansions of high officials.
I knew I could depend on them, in their sooty black hats and heavy coats...
...although they were still so young.


We shared the stolen sárka with the people. It was our form of rebellion.
Sárka minimizes the effects of having your emotions taken by Nous Ánthropos.
We were readying for a revolution.
We were opposed to Ánthropos controlling our emotions, and hoped for a world full of feelings.
But our plans were discovered, and I was captured with the other members of the resistance.
The Ekklisía, the highest court of the land, passed judgement on us.

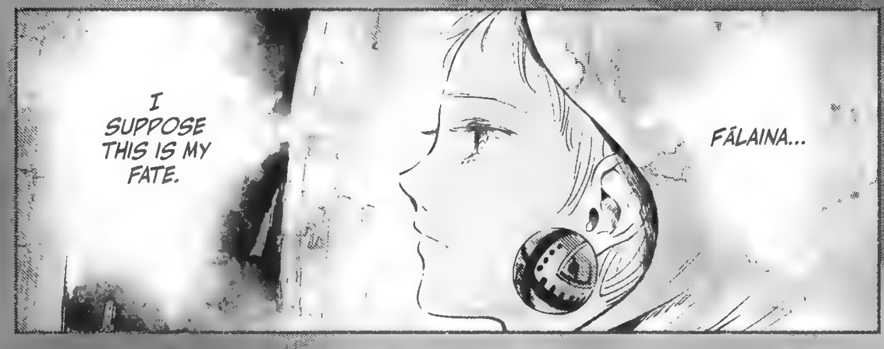

We would be...
...sent into exile, to somewhere very specific.
The Ekklisía feared the world would fill with sasa, the grains of emotion.
They believed that sasa flowed from the ends of people's fingernails and from the tips of their hair.
So to prevent the prisoners from spilling sasa, our fingernails and toenails were crushed and our hair was shorn.
We were sent into exile on an enclosed black ship, the Arkoúda.
I recognized some of the other prisoners, but we must have been rounded up from all across the country, because there were many different accents.
Arkoúda was an imperfect Nous vessel...
...so it harvested our thymia as an additional power source.



About a third of us passed away from this enervation during the voyage.
IT'S FINALLY MY TURN FOR A BREAK!
THUD
HEY...
...DO YOU THINK WE'RE REALLY GOING *THERE*?
THERE'S NO MISTAKE—WE'RE HEADING TO FĀLAINA.
REALLY?
I GOT IT FROM A RELIABLE SOURCE.
I'M THE GRANDSON OF SOMEONE ON THE EKKLISIA.
AND YOU'RE A REBEL?
WHAT A BETRAYAL.
SO?
AND WHO ARE YOU?
...
DON'T TELL ANYONE, OKAY?
GRIN
I'M FROM A FAMILY THAT GIVES BIRTH TO ANGELS.
ANGELS?


THEY'RE CALLED DAÍMONES BACK HOME.
DAÍMONES? DID YOU SAY *DAÍMONES?!*
THOSE AREN'T REAL.
THEY'RE JUST THE STUFF OF LEGEND.


HEE HEE!
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TELL ME.
WOOO


FĀLAINA...
I SUPPOSE THIS IS MY FATE.


I COULDN'T ESCAPE...
...MY FAMILY'S DESTINY AFTER ALL.


HEY...
TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.
I HAVE SEVEN YOUNGER SISTERS.
NOT ALL OF THEM ARE RELATED TO ME...
...BUT THEY ARE MY SISTERS NONETHELESS.
YOUR SISTERS DIDN'T GET CAUGHT.
AREN'T YOU WORRIED ABOUT THEM BEING LEFT ALONE?
NO...
THEY'RE VERY STRONG.
I'M SURE THEY'LL CHANGE THE COUNTRY.
WHAT ABOUT YOUR PARENTS?
MY PARENTS AND OLDER BROTHER WERE EXECUTED.
IT'S BECAUSE WE'RE UNIQUE.
A FAMILY THAT PRODUCES DAÍMONES.
HEY, IF IT'S A SECRET...
...WHY DID YOU TELL ME, SOMEONE YOU JUST MET?
...


ARE YOU FLIRTING WITH ME? DO YOU WANT SPECIAL TREATMENT?
YOU'RE NOT MY TYPE AT ALL. JUST LOOK AT WHAT YOU'RE WEARING.
HUH?
WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT-
WELL, YOU'RE NOT *MY* TYPE EITHER.
YOU'RE PRETTY, BUT YOU SEEM REALLY ASSERTIVE.
I *AM* ASSERTIVE.
I THOUGHT SO.
SO MUCH SEA.
I WONDER IF WE'RE GOING TO THE END OF THE WORLD?
I DON'T THINK WE'LL GO BACK...
EVER.
EVENING...
IT'S GETTING DARK.


CAN I HOLD ON TO YOU?
ARE YOU SCARED?
NOT REALLY.
I told him my secret for a reason.
Because I thought he seemed nice.
I WONDER WHY? HE ISN'T MY TYPE.
No one knows why.
Hearts are a complicated business.
That's the sasa they fear.
Hearts are not something you can explain or manage.


It was a voyage on which we cursed our country and feared and cursed our fate.
We had been captured halfway through our mission and were being sent to a cursed island, full of regrets.
I still remember...
EVEN STILL...
...the sasa I felt for him, my Ekató.
Even though we had been exiled...
...I somehow felt that things would be all right with him there.
I didn't care if it was a cursed island.
We would no longer have to suppress our emotions.
I was sure...


...Fálaina would be our home.
When I saw the simple, gentle ship that reminded my of a whale...
...I knew that living spiritually rich lives there...
...would be our greatest revenge on the empire.
Eight years later...
...we created the calendar of the Sand Exile.


Right after we arrived on Fálaina, a bamboo forest sprung up in the center of the island...
...which sustained us and became more abundant every year.
Our fears of starvation eased, and we laughed more freely than before.
Whether it was the influence of Nous Fálaina or living on the Sea of Sand, our skin started to become very pale.
But gradually the curse of Fálaina was exposed.
The older rebels who had been acting as our leaders died peacefully but far too early.
IT ISN'T JUST A LEGEND.
FĀLAINA IS HERETICAL... IT DOESN'T TAKE YOUR HEART. IT EATS YOUR LIFE.


HEY, BYAKU-ROKU!!
NO SHIRKING YOUR DUTIES!
GASP!
DASH
HELP ME, EKATÓ ...
AUNTIE DÝO IS SCARY.
WHISPER
HA HA!
I'M NOT AN AUNTIE.
TRY IT AGAIN.
S-
SIS-TER?
M-M...
MADE-MOI-SELLE?
BOO!


IT'S...
...MAYOR!!
THE MAYOR IS A SYMBOL OF THE CITIZENS OF THIS ISLAND.
LOOK AT THIS.
IT'S A BRAND.
I WAS A SLAVE IN THE OLD COUNTRY ...
...BUT I WAS ELECTED MAYOR BY THE PEOPLE HERE.
I WILL DO *ANYTHING* FOR THE FUTURE OF THIS ISLAND AND ITS CITIZENS.
THAT'S WHAT A MAYOR DOES.
YOU'VE ALWAYS EXUDED A SENSE OF LEADER-SHIP.
BUT YOU'RE GETTING SCARIER THESE DAYS...
SINCE YOU WERE ELECTED MAYOR, EVERYONE IS TOO SCARED TO GET CLOSE TO YOU.
...
SOME SAY IT'S BETTER FOR THE MAYOR TO HAVE NO ATTACH-MENTS.
SO WE WON'T FORM A RULING FAMILY OR CLASS.
EKATÓ, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

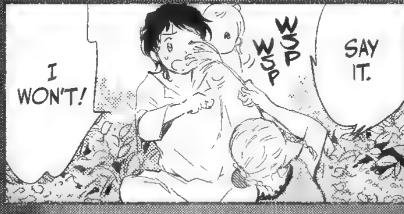

SOUNDS GOOD TO ME.




THEN NO ONE WILL TAKE YOU AWAY FROM ME.
MUMBLE


WHAT?


SAY THAT AGAIN.
NO WAY.


SAY IT.
WSP WSP
I WON'T!


I TOOK IT TO MEAN, "I REALLY LOVE YOU."
W–
WHAT? NO WAY.


COWARD!
TAKE THAT.
STOMP STOMP
STOP IT!

LET'S RUN AWAY, BYAKU-ROKU.

WAIT A MINUTE!

YOINK

DASH

FWSH FWSH

THOSE TWO ARE REALLY FRUS-TRATING.

IT'S SO OBVIOUS THEY LOVE EACH OTHER.

WHY DON'T THEY GET TOGETH-ER?

EKATÓ SAID DÝO IS JUST HIS FRIEND.

OH ...

DÝO ISN'T COMING AFTER US.

...

SOMETIMES SHE WANTS TO BE ALONE.

FĀLAINA ...

LOOK AT THIS.

I AM FROM...

...A FAMILY THAT WILL BEAR AN ANGEL WHO WILL SAVE THE WORLD.

I'VE INHERITED THAT MISSION AND THIS KEY.

BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH I LOOK...

...I CAN'T FIND THE FOUNTAIN ROOM OR THE ANGEL COCOON FROM MY FAMILY'S LORE.

WHERE ARE YOU HIDING THE DAÍMONAS?

CLANG

It's still not enough.

!


WHO IS THAT?
I am the child of Fálaina.
GASP
ARE YOU A DAIMONAS?
No, I am not.
WHAT ISN'T ENOUGH?
The sasa...
...it's still not...
...enough.
Year 10 of the Sand Exile.
GASP


DASH
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
DÝO.
I'M SORRY ...
IT'S THE INSIGNIA OF THE EKKLISÍA.
EKATÓ HAD IT.
HE JUST CON-FESSED.
HE'S AN EKKLISÍA SPY.

WAIT!
HE'S THE GRANDSON OF SOMEONE ON THE EKKLISIA...
...SO IT'S NOT ODD FOR HIM TO HAVE THAT INSIGNIA.
YOU HAVE IT BACKWARDS. HE'S *OUR* SPY.
NO.

THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO COME FOR ME...
THE INSIGNIA IS HOW THEY WILL IDENTIFY ME.
I'M TO INVESTIGATE FALAINA AND *THAT*...
...BEFORE THE EMISSARY ARRIVES.

GRAB
HE WON'T SAY ANY MORE.

THERE ARE PEOPLE FROM THE MOTHERLAND COMING HERE?!
SHHF
IF EKATÓ GIVES THEM THE INFORMATION THEY NEED...
...WE MIGHT BE CONSIDERED UNNECESSARY AND BE EXECUTED!
NO WAY!


I THOUGHT IT WAS STRANGE...
THEY COULD HAVE KILLED US, BUT INSTEAD THEY TOOK THE TROUBLE OF EXILING US TO THIS PLACE...
...THIS DUBIOUS ISLAND.
SHHF
SHHF
I'M SURE HE HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH US GETTING CAUGHT IN THE FIRST PLACE!
CALM DOWN!
AND STOP BEING VIOLENT.
IF THE ISLAND IS DE-STROYED BECAUSE WE GIVE IN TO ANGER...
...IT PROVES THAT EMO-TIONS ARE HARMFUL.
IT WILL BE A SOURCE OF AMUSE-MENT FOR THE PEOPLE BACK HOME.
THEN WHAT DO WE DO?
EKATÓ IS A CANCER ON THIS ISLAND.
DÝO, AS MAYOR, YOU DECIDE.
MAYBE DÝO WILL LET EKATÓ GO.
GO WHERE? WE'RE IN A CAGE ON A SEA OF SAND.



ARE THEY REALLY COMING TO GET YOU?
I'M NOT SURE.
THEY DOUBTED MY LOYALTY TO THE EKLLISÍA.
I WAS A PART OF THE REBELLION, AFTER ALL.
THEY HAD TO DO A LOT OF DEPRO-GRAMMING WHEN THEY GOT ME.
I GUESS THESE PEOPLE ASSUME I'M A SPY SENT HERE BY THE EKLLISÍA.
BUT I DON'T THINK THE EMISSARY IS EVER COMING.
IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS.
AND I CAME HERE AS A SPY.
I'M A DIRTY TRAITOR.
TELL EVERYONE THAT...
I'M THE ONE WHO LEAKED THE PLANS FOR THE REVOLU-TION.
...AND I'LL HELP YOU.
I'LL TAKE CARE OF THE REST.
I'M THE MAYOR, SO I HAVE POWERS.


KILL ME.
RMMBL
RMMBL
"I DESERVE TO BE PUNISHED.
AND EVEN IF THE EMISSARY NEVER COMES, AS LONG AS I'M ALIVE..."
"...THE FEAR AND ANGER FROM BEING PRISONERS WILL NEVER FADE."
PLIP
WHY?
PLIP
DASH
DASH
"THAT'S WHAT FEELINGS ARE. PEOPLE'S HEARTS...
...WILL EVENTUALLY TURN TO DARKNESS."
"THE DARKNESS WILL SWALLOW THE ISLAND..."
"THAT'S WHY."


ZSSSH
"TO PROTECT THE FUTURE OF THE ISLAND..."
"...ELIMINATE ME AND THAT DARKNESS."
PLIP
PLIP
DÝO, LOOK.
THIS IS MY SISTER'S SON.
HIS NAME IS KOGARE.


SKKSH
OH!
HUH?


I'M BEING SWALLOWED...
...BY THE WALL.
Yes...
...that's right.
Can you see it? The sasa is flowing out of you like an ocean.
There is enough sasa now.
The fountain room will open.
WHY NOW? AT A TIME LIKE THIS?
Now is the only time.
Now is the time to use your key...
Only you, now, can find Midén.
Go and find him.


THE FOUNTAIN ROOM?
It was Midén's cocoon.
It was a new life brought forth by kneading together the soul stuff of everyone on the island.
It was psychi, an amassment of souls that can only be created on Fálaina, where the life force of those who live on it is slowly absorbed.
A clay doll brought to life.
An angel called daimonas.


I birthed a ten-year-old boy from that cocoon.


IS THAT... BY ANY CHANCE A DAÍMONAS?
THIS IS WHAT YOU WERE LOOKING FOR, RIGHT?
HOW DID YOU CREATE HIM?
I WON'T SAY...
IT'S A FAMILY SECRET.
THIS CHILD IS THE LAST DAÍMONAS IN THE WORLD.
AND THERE WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER ONE.
THE ONLY ONE CAPABLE OF DESTROY-ING A NOUS.
HE'S WHAT THEY MOST FEAR, RIGHT?
THAT'S RIGHT.



YOU REALLY DID CREATE IT IN FĀLAINA...
HA HA!
I FINALLY FOUND OUT... IT'S GOING TO TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN!
THAT SOUNDS JUST LIKE YOU.
HAVE HIM EXECUTE ME.
HE'S THE MOST FITTING DÍMIOS ...
THAT'S WHY YOU BROUGHT HIM, ISN'T IT?
...
I WANT TO TELL YOU ONE LAST THING...
I'M NOT BEG-GING FOR MY LIFE.
I...
...LIKED YOU, DÝO.
I CAN'T SAY I LOVED YOU, THOUGH ...
THAT WASN'T THE KIND OF RELATION-SHIP WE HAD.

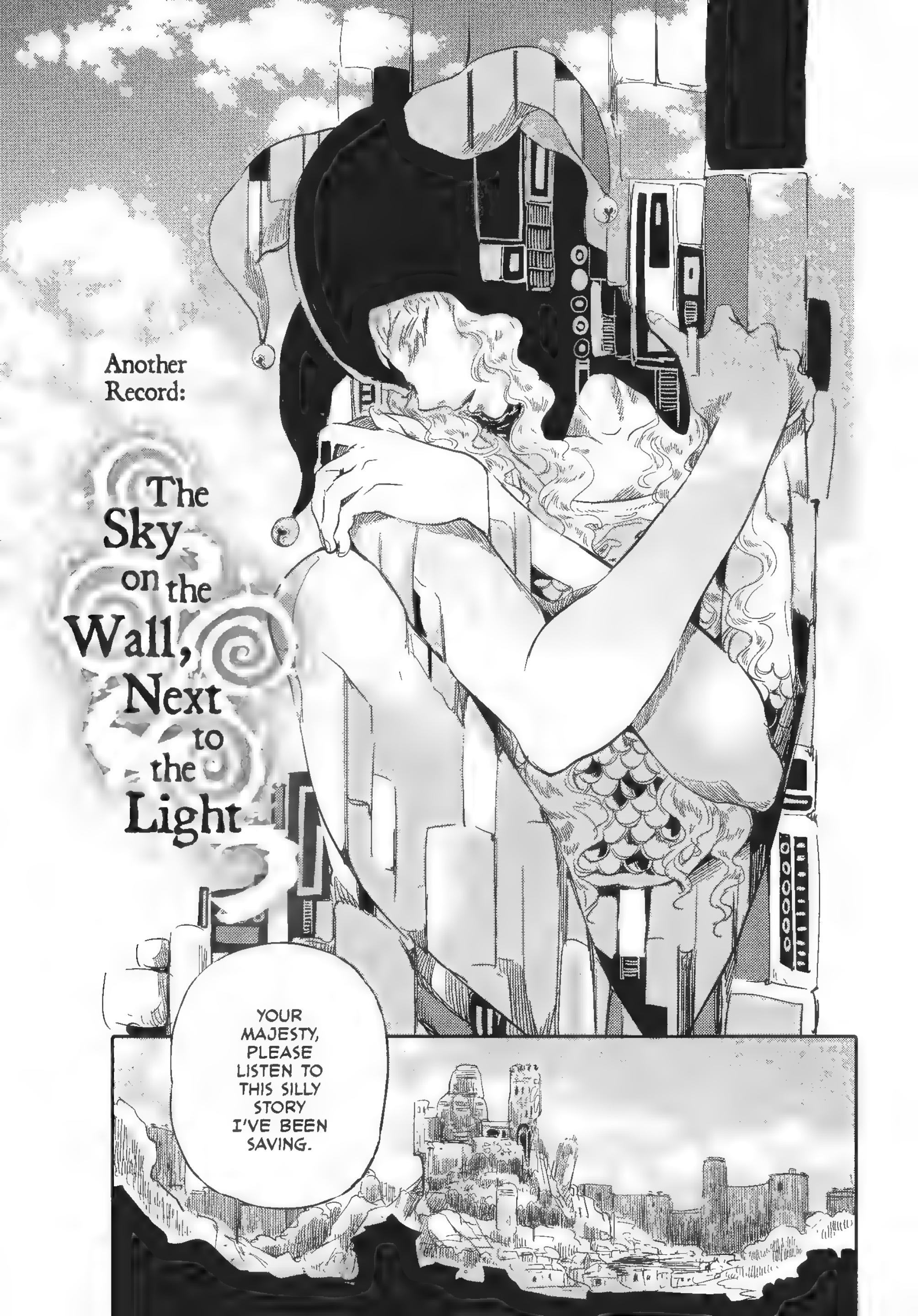

I FIGURED I SHOULDN'T LOVE ANYONE...
... BECAUSE I'M A TRAITOR.
I'M SORRY I WAS SO IRRESO-LUTE...
...FOR TEN YEARS.
I KNOW HOW YOU FELT, DÝO.
YOU IDIOT.
MAYBE I COULD HAVE JUST LIVED ON THIS ISLAND...
BUT THERE IS NO FUTURE FOR ME.
THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I IMAGINED A FUTURE.
BUT... THERE IS ONE FOR YOU.


TUG
HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO LET HIM TALK...
...MAMA?
IT'S ONLY GOING TO UPSET YOU MORE.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO SUFFER.
MIDÉN.
DO IT.
HWOOO


I would become strong.
If I couldn't protect this island, then losing Ekató would have been meaningless.



A Birth -The End-


Another Record:
The Sky on the Wall, Next to the Light
YOUR MAJESTY, PLEASE LISTEN TO THIS SILLY STORY I'VE BEEN SAVING.


NOW LET'S SEE, WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN...? THERE WAS AN ODD COUNTRY...
...WHERE THE KING AND HIS SUBJECTS WERE FOREVER SUSPICIOUS OF OTHERS AND HAD NO TRUST FOR EACH OTHER.
ONE BY ONE, PEOPLE WERE THROWN INTO THE DUNGEON.
IN THAT COUNTRY, EXECUTIONS ...
...WERE BANNED FOR RELIGIOUS REASONS, SO THE PRISONERS ...
...JUST KEPT MULTIPLYING.


THE PRISON, A FAMOUS BLACK-WALLED FORTRESS, WAS PERMANENTLY FULL...
...FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, JAM-PACKED LIKE A BEE-HIVE.
SHING
THEN ONE DAY...
...THE KING JUST UP AND DIED!
THERE WAS A HUGE CLAMOR TO DISCOVER HIS KILLER...
"*HE* LOOKS SUSPICIOUS..."
"THIS ONE TOO!"
THE LIST OF SUSPECTS SWELLED ...
...UNTIL FINALLY, THEY HAD THROWN 103 PEOPLE INTO PRISON.

WHAT INSANITY!

OTHER COUNTRIES WHISPERED THAT IT WOULDN'T BE LONG BEFORE THE ENTIRE COUNTRY BECAME A PRISON.

SO, YOUR MAJESTY...

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT ODD COUNTRY?

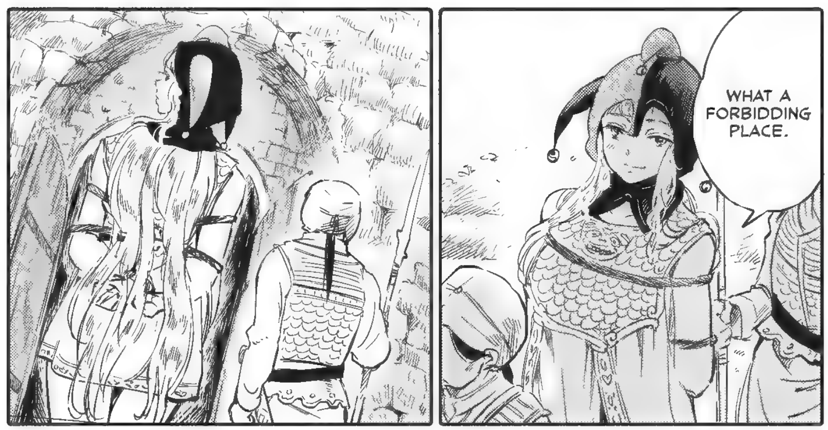


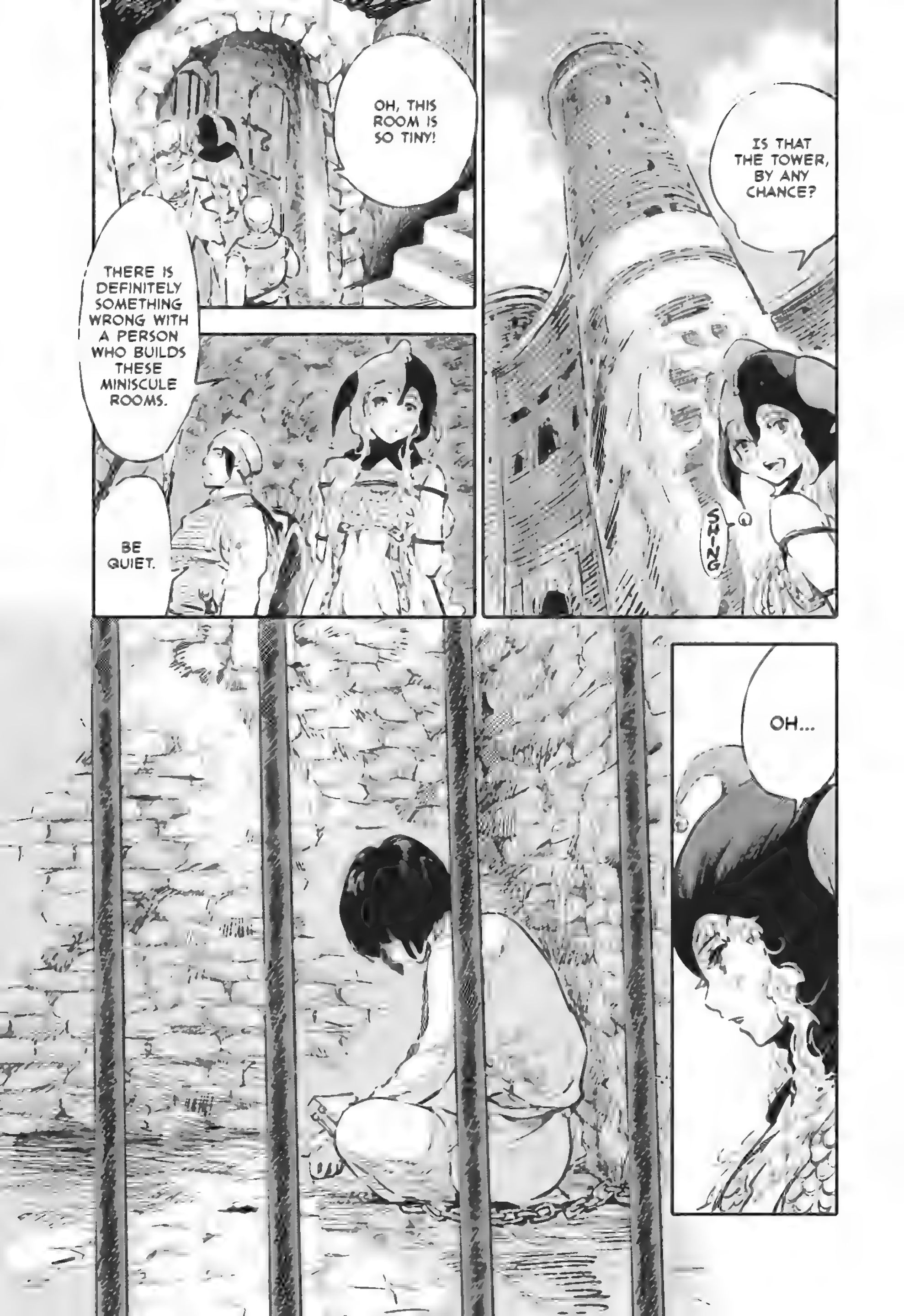



AH HA HA, EXCELLENT!
SHING
YOU SHOULD MAKE ME NUMBER 104!
SHUT UP!
IF YOU DON'T SHUT UP, I'LL THROW YOU INTO PRISON, JESTER!
TAKE HER AWAY.

GOODNESS, BEING SARCASTIC TO THE KING IS PART OF MY JOB DESCRIPTION...

WHAT AM I TO DO IF IT LANDS ME IN PRISON?




OH, THIS ROOM IS SO TINY!
THERE IS DEFINITELY SOMETHING WRONG WITH A PERSON WHO BUILDS THESE MINISCULE ROOMS.
BE QUIET.
IS THAT THE TOWER, BY ANY CHANCE?
SHING
OH...


WAIT, I WANT TO STAY HERE!
THERE'S A CUTE KID IN THIS ONE.


IS IT OKAY TO PUT HER IN A MEN'S CELL?
DOESN'T MATTER.


JESTERS AREN'T REALLY PEOPLE. SHE'S JUST LIKE A DOG.
UNDO HER RE-STRAINTS.


SHE'S NEW.


SHOOM




WHAT?


W-
WAIT...
WAIT,
PLEASE!


M-
MOVE.
SHOVE


GRIN
...


PLEASE
TELL HIS
MAJESTY
...
...IT'S
ALL
WRONG.

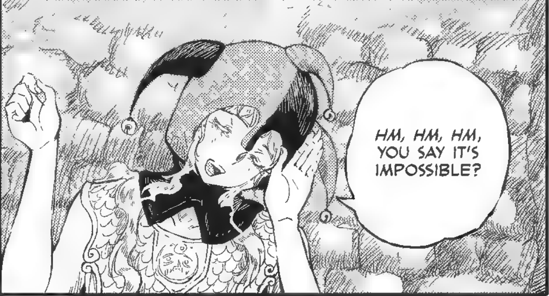

SLAM
I
DIDN'T
KILL
THE
LATE
KING!


WAIT
...!
THUNK


DAMN
...

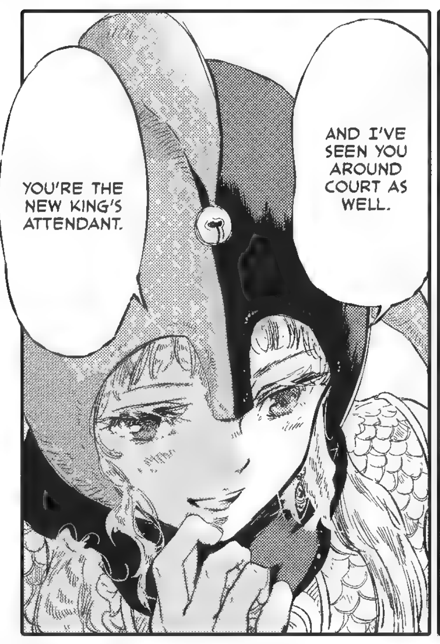

TAP


WHOA!
YOU'RE HUGE...
YEAH, IT'S A LITTLE TIGHT IN HERE.
MR. WALL, MR. WALL...
...PLEASE GIVE US SOME MORE ROOM!


HM, HM, HM, YOU SAY IT'S IMPOSSIBLE?


...


Y- YOU...
YOU'RE THE JESTER THAT HIS MAJESTY'S FATHER, THE LATE KING, EMPLOYED.


AND I'VE SEEN YOU AROUND COURT AS WELL.
YOU'RE THE NEW KING'S ATTENDANT.


WHY DID YOU GET ARRESTED?
YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO ASK THE KING THAT.
IF HE EVER VISITS.
YOU HAVE IT GOOD...



PEOPLE DON'T LIVE VERY LONG, ONCE THEY'RE IN HERE.

NO ONE IS EVER RELEASED ONCE THEY'RE IMPRISONED.

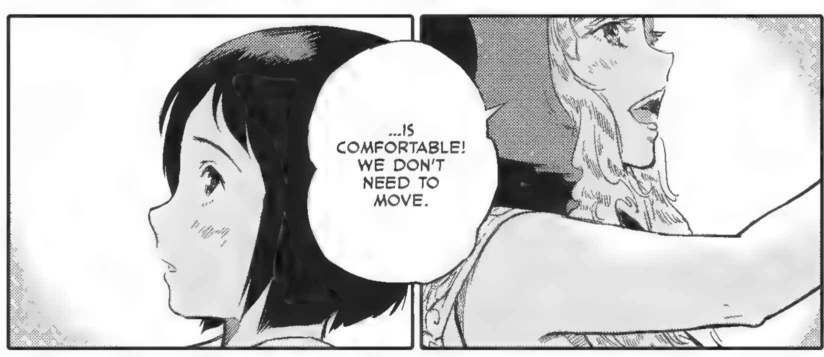
WHEN THE PRISON GETS FULL, THEY TORTURE PRISONERS OR CUT BACK ON FOOD TO MAKE THEM DIE FASTER.

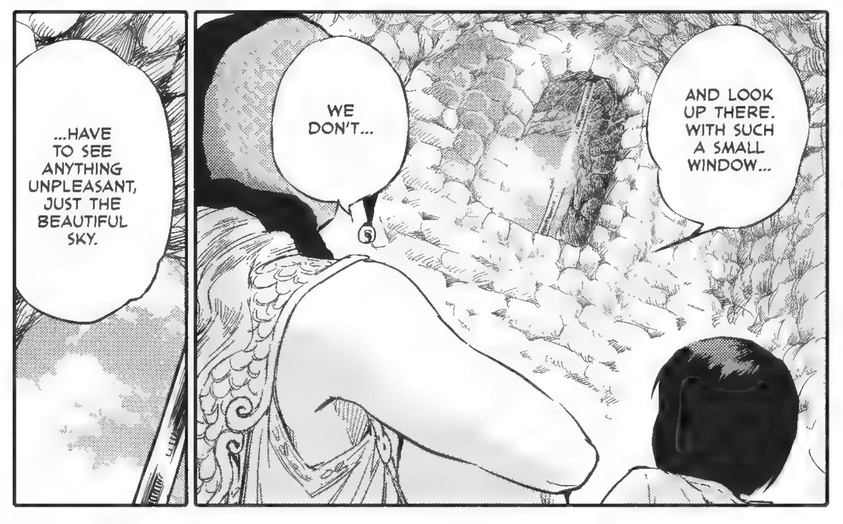
SICKNESS, VIOLENCE, STARVA-TION...

...AND THE CRAMPED QUARTERS—

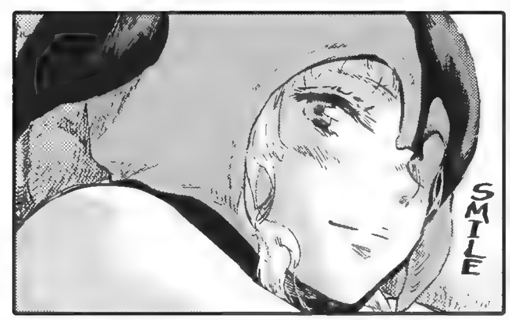



WELL, SIR...
...HAVE YOU NOT NOTICED?
BEING THIS COZY...


...IS COMFORTABLE! WE DON'T NEED TO MOVE.


AND LOOK UP THERE. WITH SUCH A SMALL WINDOW...
WE DON'T...
...HAVE TO SEE ANYTHING UNPLEASANT, JUST THE BEAUTIFUL SKY.





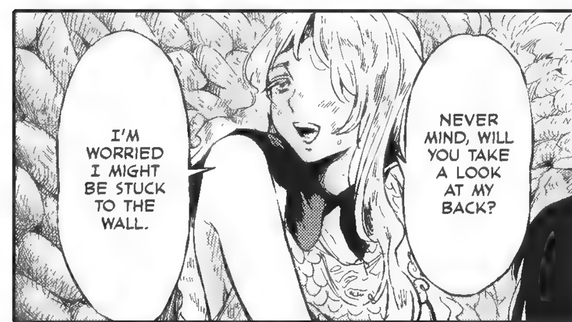
LOOK AT THAT...

THE LIGHT SHINES ON US, EVEN FROM A SMALL WINDOW.


SKRTCH
HOW MANY DAYS HAS IT BEEN?
YOU KEEP TRACK, DON'T YOU?
COUNT THEM YOURSELF.
...
NO...
IT'S TOO OVER-WHELMING.


AREN'T YOU SORE?
YOU CAN'T MOVE BECAUSE OF YOUR SIZE.
I DON'T NEED TO MOVE.
SUCH A BOTHER ANYWAY.


HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP PRE-TEND-ING?


NEVER MIND, WILL YOU TAKE A LOOK AT MY BACK?
I'M WORRIED I MIGHT BE STUCK TO THE WALL.


YOU'RE NOT STUCK, BUT THERE'S BLOOD ALONG YOUR SPINE.


WHY DON'T YOU ASK TO BE MOVED SOME-WHERE SO YOU CAN LIE DOWN?


NO NEED.
FWIP


...


YOU COME FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY, DON'T YOU?
IS EVERYONE IN YOUR COUNTRY BIG?
COM-PARED TO YOU.


YOUR MOM TOO?


YES, HER TOO.


WHY DID YOU BECOME A COURT JESTER?
WERE YOU SOLD?



...

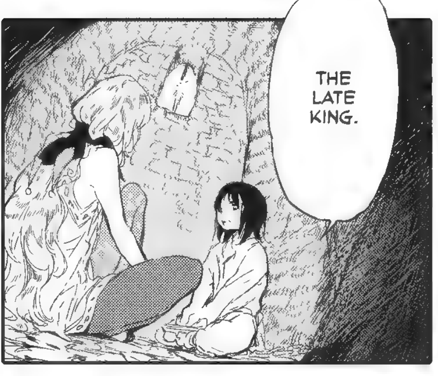
I'LL TELL YOU MY SECRET...

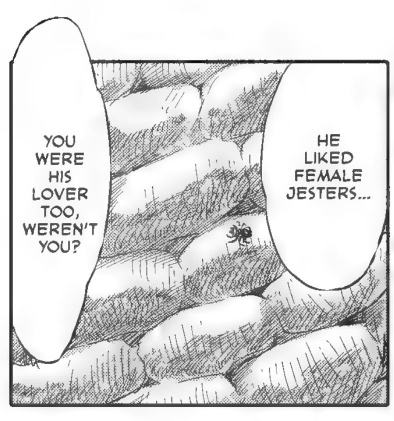
MY MOTHER WAS A COURT JESTER.

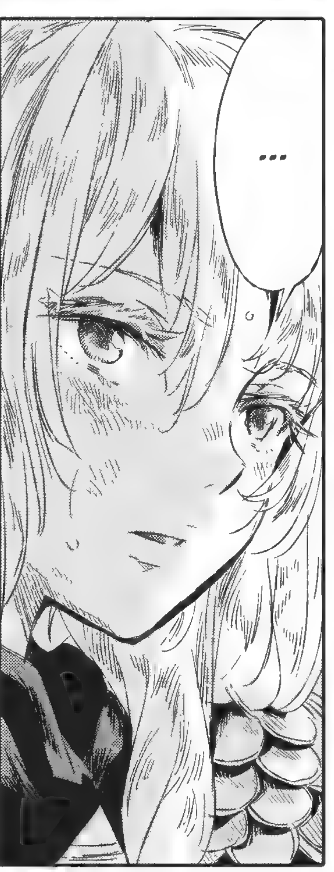
SHE WAS FROM A FOREIGN COUNTRY, LIKE YOU.

WELL, IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A SECRET, BUT SOME PEOPLE AT COURT KNOW.

AND WHO DO YOU THINK MY FATHER IS?


THE LATE KING.


HE LIKED FEMALE JESTERS...
YOU WERE HIS LOVER TOO, WEREN'T YOU?


...


JESTERS AREN'T CONSIDERED REAL PEOPLE...
...SO I WASN'T ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE KING'S CHILD.


BUT I BECAME THE ATTENDANT OF THE PRINCE, MY OLDER BROTHER...
...AND I WAS SATISFIED... I REALLY WAS.

MY MOM DIED WHEN I WAS ABOUT THREE.

IT WAS ON THE KING'S ORDERS. SHE WAS THROWN IN PRISON FOR A CRIME SHE DIDN'T COMMIT...

...AND SHE FELL SICK AND DIED IN A SMALL CELL.

THEN RUMORS ABOUT ME BEGAN TO FLY THROUGH COURT...

"THE JESTER'S SON MUST LOATHE HIS FATHER THE KING."







I'M SURE HIS MAJESTY WILL REMEMBER...

...THAT I'M INNOCENT AND HOW I LONG TO SUPPORT HIM.

I'M GOING TO STAY ALIVE HERE UNTIL HE REALIZES THAT.

...

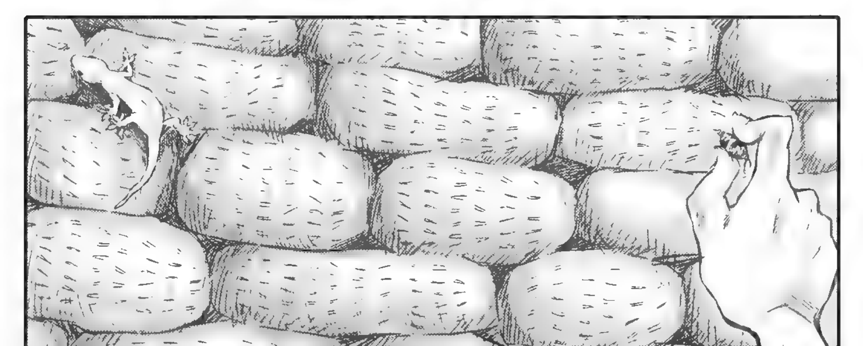
W- WHAT'S WRONG?!

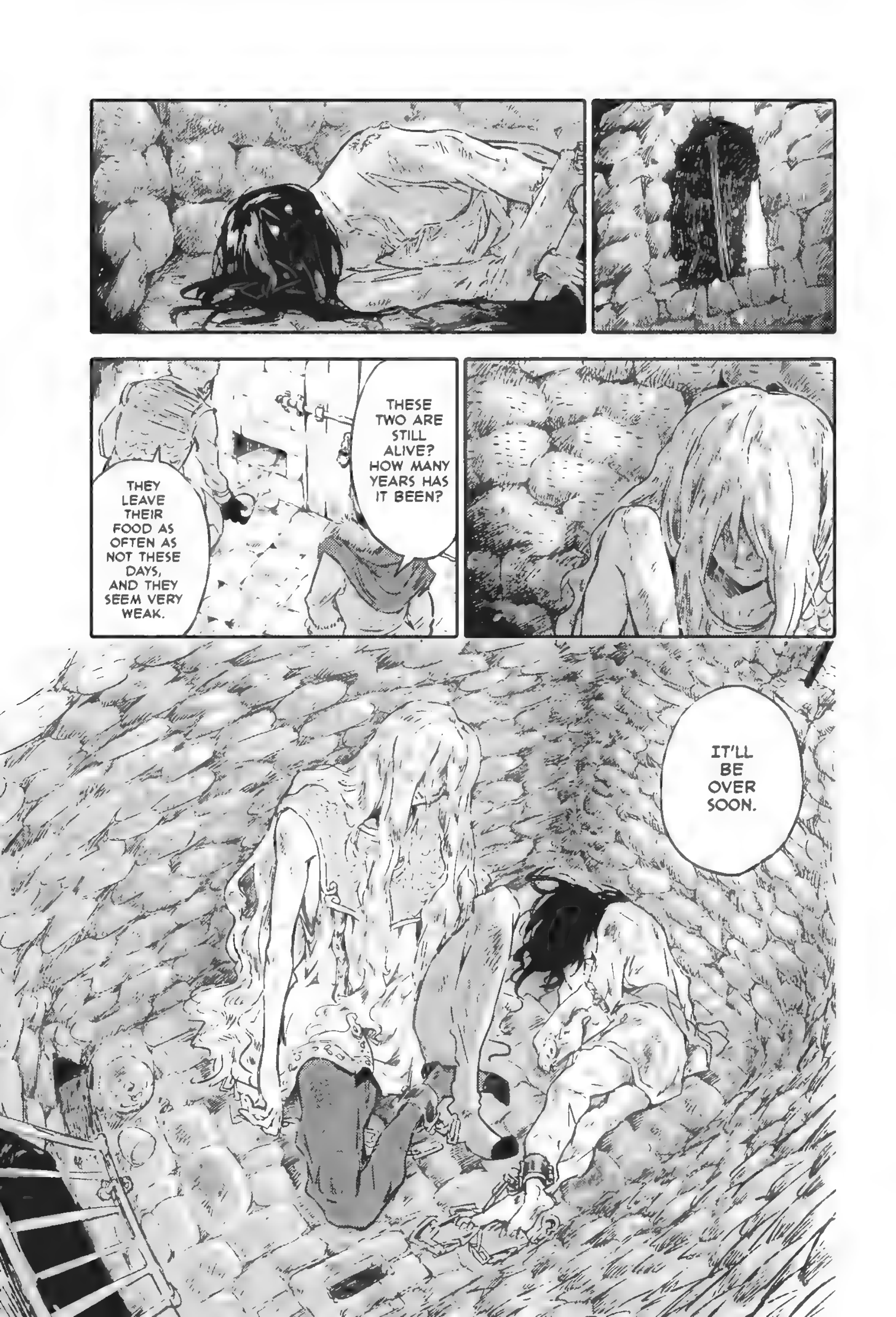
S-STOP...!

NEVER MIND, I'LL LIVE HERE WITH YOU...

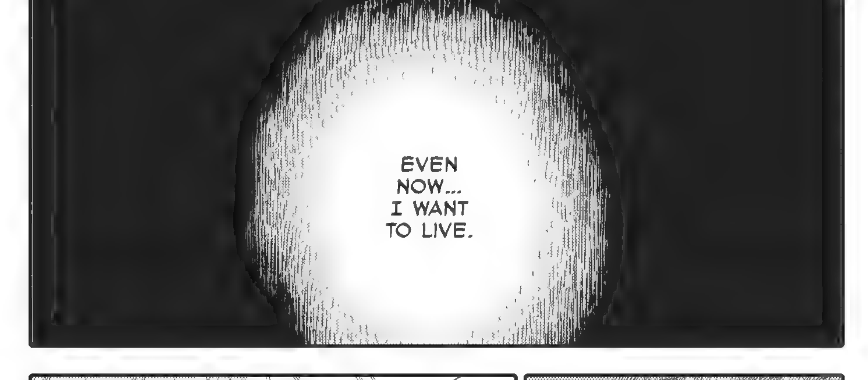
WE'LL WAIT.






THESE TWO ARE STILL ALIVE? HOW MANY YEARS HAS IT BEEN?
THEY LEAVE THEIR FOOD AS OFTEN AS NOT THESE DAYS, AND THEY SEEM VERY WEAK.
IT'LL BE OVER SOON.


THE SKY IS...SO SMALL.
NO MATTER HOW MANY DAYS PASS... IT'S STILL SMALL.
EVERY TIME NIGHT COMES ...
...I FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO SNAP.
YOU DON'T NEED TO SAY ANY-THING— JUST HOLD ME.
OTHER-WISE I FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO DISAP-PEAR.
I DON'T WANT TO BE LIKE A CORPSE.
EVEN NOW...



ANOTHER DAY.

YAP YAP, I'M A DOG LIVING IN A DOGHOUSE.

WOOF WOOF, YOU'RE MY MASTER LIVING IN A DOG-HOUSE.

YOU MADE YOUR MISSUS MAD, AND SHE SHUT YOU IN.

MASTER, YOU'RE IN THE DOG-HOUSE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

HEH HEH

CREAK



Y-YOU'RE GOING TO TORTURE HIM NOW?

I... I...

WAIT!

WAIT ...!

I KILLED HIM...

I KILLED THE KING.





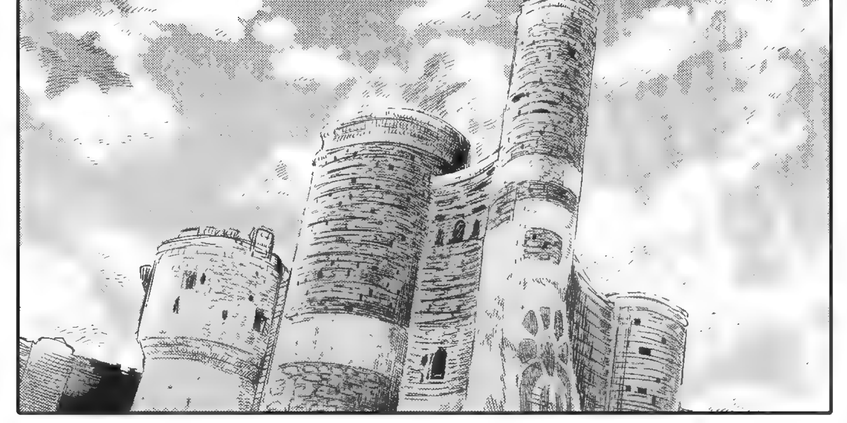
SLAM

HE'S DONE NOTHING ...!

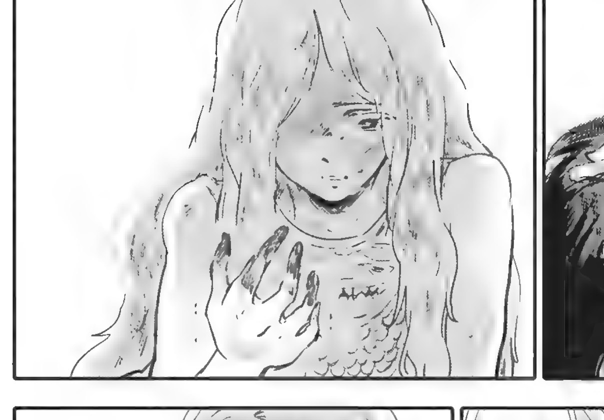
EVER SINCE I MET YOU, I'VE REGRETTED...

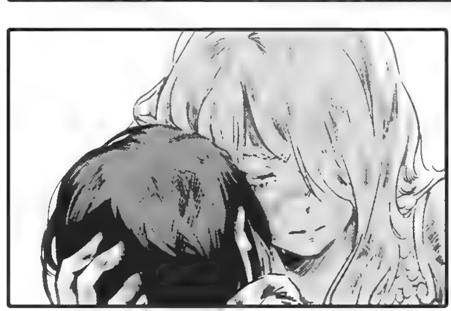
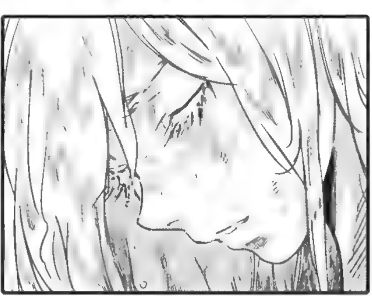
...THAT THIS WAS MY ONLY CHOICE...

MOM...



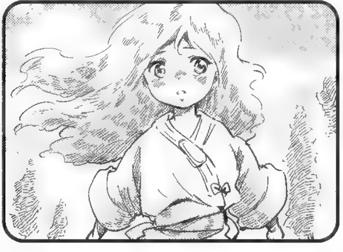
THUD
THE CELLS ARE ALL FULL, SO IT WOULD BE NICE IF A FEW MORE OF THESE WOULD CROAK.
HEY...
... DON'T SAY THAT.
...











WHEN MY MOTHER WAS SOLD TO A NEIGHBORING COUNTRY TO BECOME A JESTER...

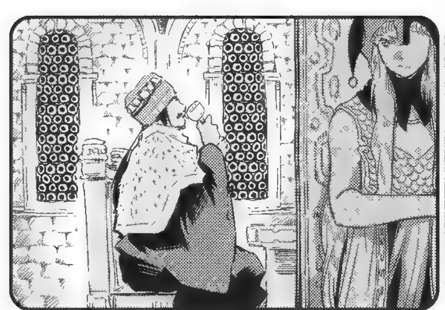
...AND ONLY HER HAIR WAS RETURNED TO US WHEN SHE DIED...

...I SWORE VENGEANCE.

I WOULD BECOME A JESTER LIKE MY MOTHER, ENTER THE ENEMY'S CASTLE AND, WITH MY OWN HAND, KILL THE MISTRUSTFUL KING.







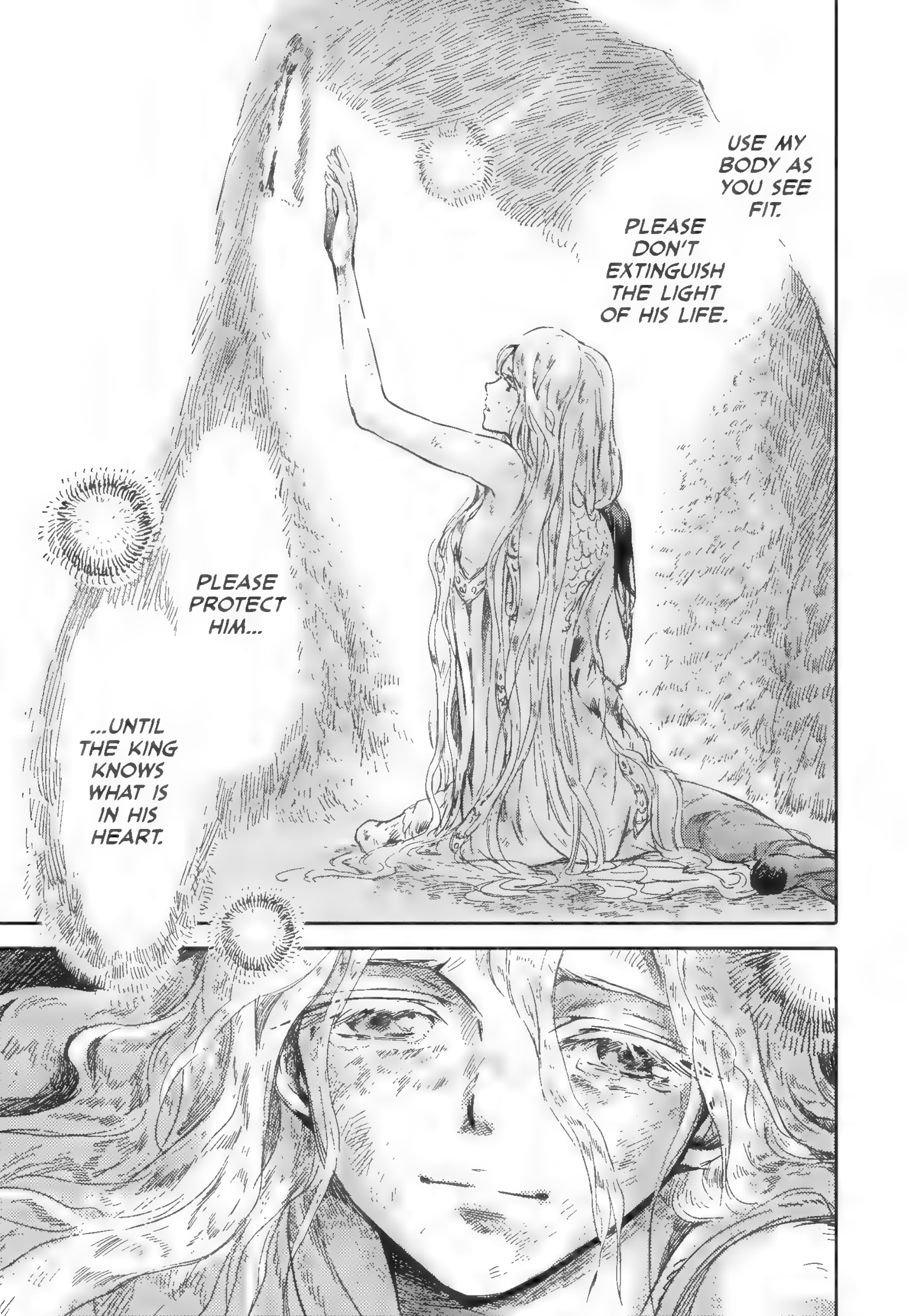

I HAVE NO REGRETS.

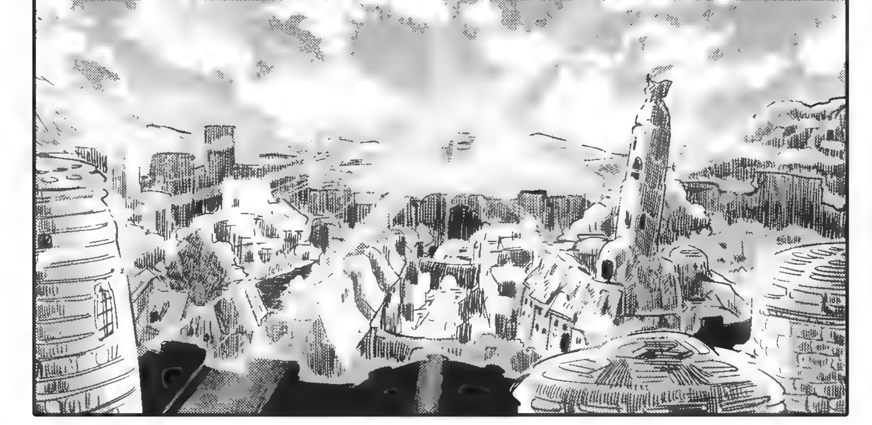

I THOUGHT I WAS PREPARED...
...EVEN IF I WAS IMPRISONED LIKE MY MOTHER AND DIED.

MY MOTHER WAS A COURT JESTER.
SHE WAS FROM A FOREIGN COUNTRY, LIKE YOU.
HAD I KNOWN THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN...
HAD I KNOWN THIS CHILD WAS IN THE PALACE...
HAD I KNOWN HE WAS BEING KEPT IN A PLACE LIKE THIS...

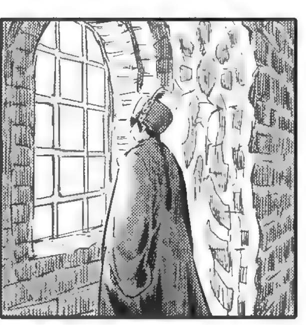


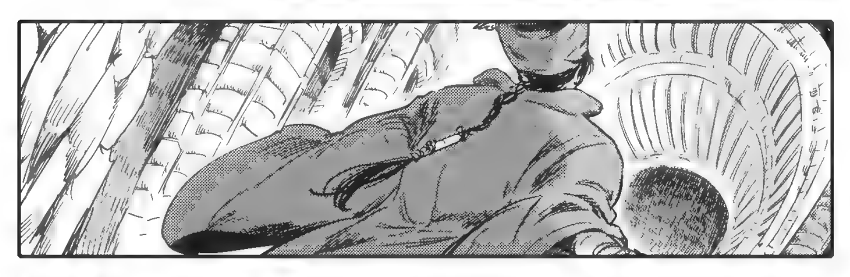
OH HEAVENLY LIGHT, GIVER OF LIFE...
I WILL TAKE ON ALL THE PUNISHMENT...
PLEASE...
...GIVE WHATEVER LIFE I HAVE LEFT...
...TO MY LITTLE BROTHER.


USE MY BODY AS YOU SEE FIT.
PLEASE DON'T EXTINGUISH THE LIGHT OF HIS LIFE.
PLEASE PROTECT HIM...
...UNTIL THE KING KNOWS WHAT IS IN HIS HEART.



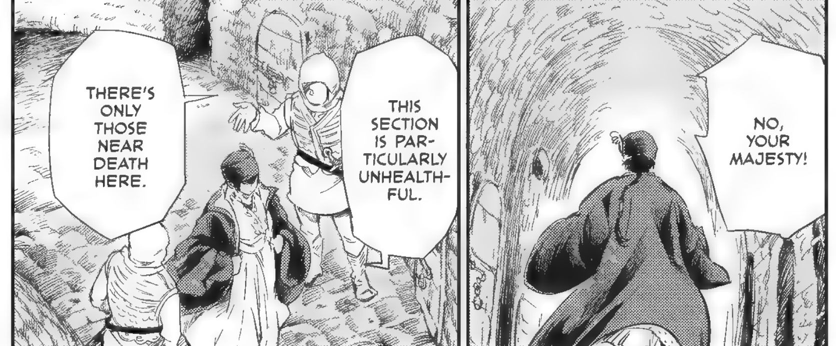






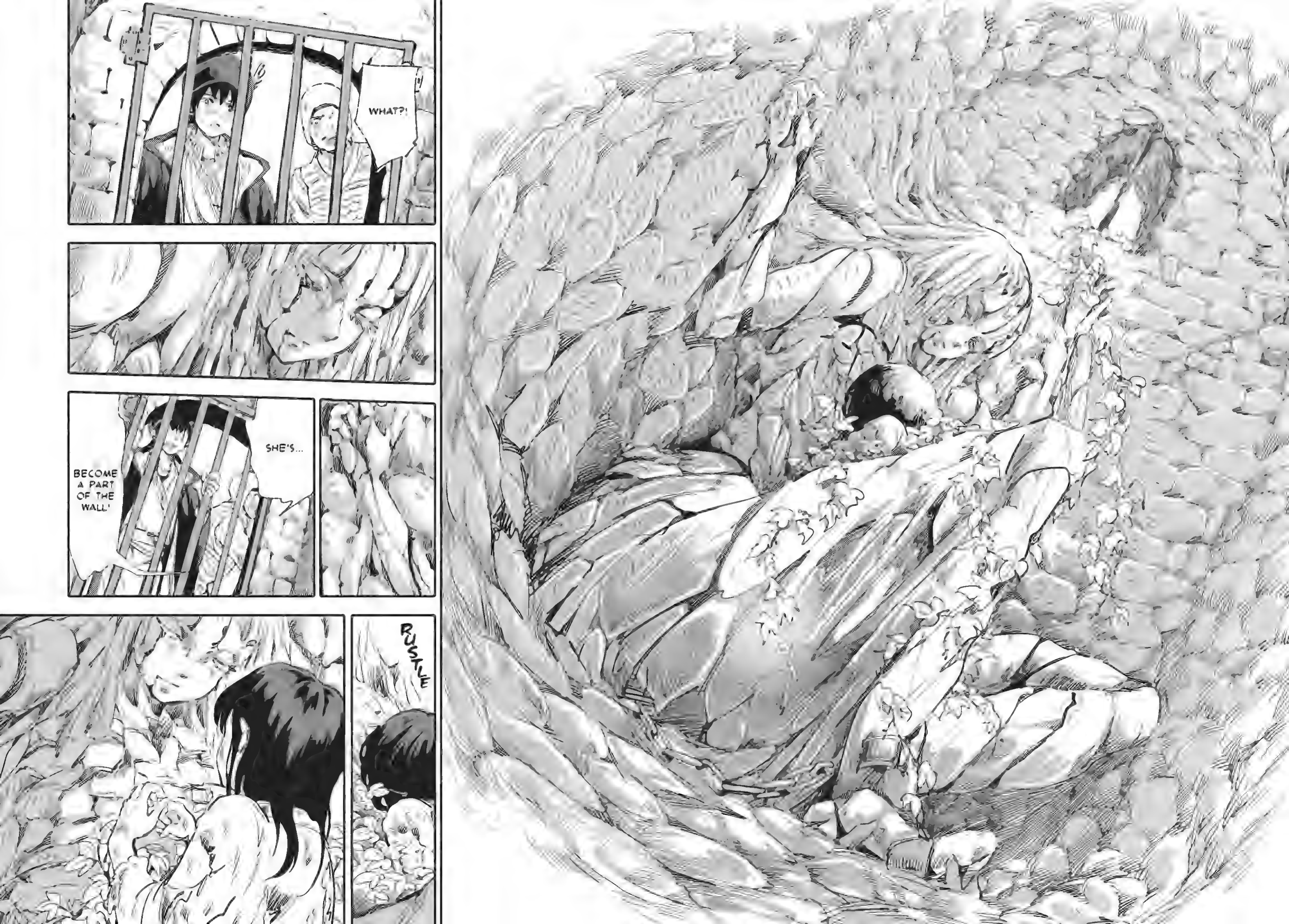

YOUR MAJESTY, WHAT'S WRONG?


WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?


NO, YOUR MAJESTY!
THIS SECTION IS PARTICULARLY UNHEALTHFUL.
THERE'S ONLY THOSE NEAR DEATH HERE.


THOSE TWO IN THERE ARE ALMOST DONE FOR.
OPEN IT!
HUH?


THEY HAVEN'T TAKEN ANY FOOD OR DRINK IN ABOUT THREE DAYS.
WE WERE GOING TO CHECK ON THEM TODAY.
CLANG
CREAK



WHAT?!
SHE'S...
BECOME A PART OF THE WALL!
RUSTLE


JESTER ...
WHAT HAP-PENED ?
YOU ...
WAKE UP.
PLEASE!
TALK TO ME...


DASH
YOUR MAJESTY ?



The Sky on the Wall, Next to the Light -The End-

Children of the Whales volume 7 -The End-



A Note on Names

Those who live on the Mud Whale are named after colors in a language unknown. Abi Umeda uses Japanese translations of the names, which we have maintained. Here is a list of the English equivalents for the curious.

Aijiro	pale blue
Benihi	scarlet
Buki	kerria flower (*yamabuki*)
Byakuroku	malachite mineral pigments, pale green tinged with white
Chakuro	blackish brown (*cha* = brown, *kuro* = black)
Ginshu	vermillion
Hakuji	porcelain white
Jiki	golden
Kicha	yellowish brown
Kikujin	koji mold, yellowish green
Kogare	burnt muskwood, dark reddish brown
Kuchiba	decayed-leaf brown
Masoh	cinnabar
Miru	seaweed green
Neri	silk white
Nezu	mouse gray
Nibi	dark gray
Ouni	safflower red
Rasha	darkest blue, nearly black
Ro	lacquer black
Sami	light green (*asa* = light, *midori* = green)
Shikoku	purple-tinged black
Shikon	purple-tinged navy

Shinono	the color of dawn (*shinonome*)
Shuan	dark bloodred
Sienna	reddish brown
Sumi	ink black
Suou	raspberry red
Taisha	red ocher
Tobi	reddish brown like a kite's feather
Tokusa	scouring rush green
Urumi	muddy gray



My manga style is very cluttered and rough around the edges, but in real life I prefer things to be simple. Perhaps it's a reaction to my work?

—Abi Umeda

ABI UMEDA debuted as a manga creator with the one-shot "Yukokugendan" in *Weekly Shonen Champion. Children of the Whales* is her eighth manga work.



VOLUME 7
VIZ Signature Edition

Story and Art by Abi Umeda

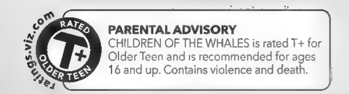
Translation / JN Productions
Touch-Up Art & Lettering / Annaliese Christman
Design / Julian (JR) Robinson
Editor / Pancha Diaz

Printed in the U.S.A.

Published by VIZ Media, LLC
P.O. Box 77010
San Francisco, CA 94107

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
First printing, November 2018








Chapter 28
The Color of the Far-Off Sky


Midén.
The first mayor of the Mud Whale.
A child called daímonas...
...born in this room in the midst of tragedy.
DAÍMONAS...
...CALLED OUNI.
CHAKKI, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YOU'RE READING LIKE YOU'RE POSSESSED.
WHEN WE BOARDED SKYROS, THAT'S WHAT THE ENEMY SOLDIERS...
CHAKURO.


OH...
THE SENTENCES DISAPPEAR HERE...
THEY'VE BEEN ERASED.
The first mayor couldn't write beyond this.
WHY?
!
THE THREAD HAS BEEN PICKED UP AGAIN.
DIFFERENT HAND-WRITING. IT'S SOMEONE ELSE.
The knotweed ink was fading...
...but it was being preserved by shiny, lichen-like grains of sand and was still trying to transmit...
...the continuation of Midén's story.
...
My mother was pregnant when she was exiled and had me right after she landed on the island.
I was the first child to be born on this island.


I AM...
...the third mayor, Byakuroku.
Year 16 of the Sand Exile...
I am 16 years old.
IT'S THE ELDEST!
This is the year they decided that we would keep from our descendants the fact that this island, our Mud Whale, was a cage for criminals.
BYAKU-ROKU ...
LET'S MAKE THIS ISLAND THE MOST LOVELY PARADISE ON EARTH, TOGETHER.
YES!
YOU CAN COUNT ON ME, MAYOR DYO.
I'M SURE YOU'LL BECOME A GREAT LEADER WHO PROTECTS EVERYONE.


Dýo...
Our first mayor was a strong, fair woman, like the sun.
My mother couldn't get used to life on the sand and had passed away early...
...so I thought of Dýo, who kept an eye out for me, as a sister or a mother.
But...
...about six years ago, little by little, her eyes became murky and cloudy.
MOTHER ...
WHY DOES THE SKY CHANGE COLOR?


YOU KNOW, MIDÉN...
...IT'S PROBABLY ...
...BECAUSE THE SKY DOESN'T WANT ANYONE TO FORGET ABOUT IT.
IT'S CRYING AND SAYING, "LOOK, THIS IS MY COLOR."
At the time, the Mud Whale was administered by a group called the Tower Pinnacle Committee, made up of representatives from both the Marked and the Unmarked.


Even I could tell that Dýo's relationship with the Tower Pinnacle Committee...
...was deteriorating.
It's because of him.
He appears, almost like a ghost...
The Clay Doll.
THE CLAY DOLL...
THE CLAY DOLL?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
BYAKU-ROKU.
I'LL STOP THE BLEED-ING.


The man whose fingers were severed from his left hand was a member of the Tower Pinnacle Committee.
PEOPLE CAN'T BE PUNISHED WITHOUT CAUSE!
THIS HAS HAPPENED BEFORE...
...MAYOR DÝO.
YOU'VE BEEN SEEN WITH A CHILD OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN...
...MANY TIMES.
SOME PEOPLE ARE SAYING...
...IT MAY BE THE DAÍMONAS OF FÁLAINA.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.
DAÍMONES ARE A THING OF LEGEND.
PERHAPS LIVING ON THE SAND FOR SO LONG IS STARTING TO AFFECT THEIR MINDS.

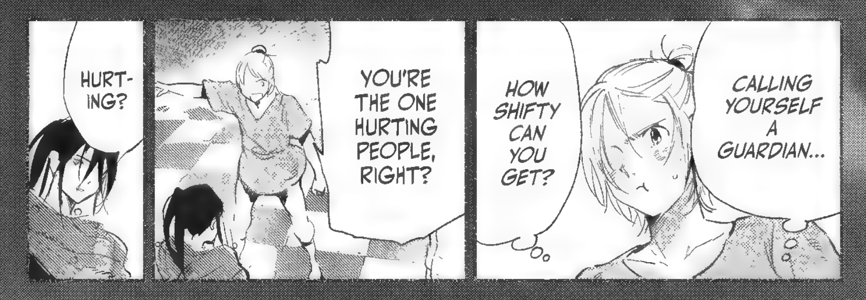

THAT MAN WAS ATTEMPTING TO MONOPOLIZE OUR SUPPLIES.
WHEN I CONFRONTED HIM, HE TOLD ME THAT I WAS BEING A DICTATOR AND SHOULD RESIGN.
BY PURSUING THE FREEDOM OF OUR HEARTS, WE RUN THE RISK THAT SOME WILL STRAY FROM THE RIGHT PATH FOR SELFISH REASONS.
CALL HIM A DAÍMONAS IF YOU WANT...
...BUT MAYBE PEOPLE *SHOULD* PAY A PRICE FOR THEIR ACTIONS.
The empire had frightening legends of the daímones, berserkers with superhuman powers.
IF YOU DON'T DO YOUR CHORES, THE CLAY DOLL WILL CUT OFF YOUR HANDS!
And on this small island of exile, the same tales of a monster called the Clay Doll...
EEEEK!
NO, NO!
...were gradually making people more and more uneasy.


Why did this disturbing creature remain a mystery?
I believe it was because the island was in a period of transition.
We had decided to hide certain facts from the next generation ...
That we were criminals imprisoned on the island...
...and that our short lives were a part of our punishment.
At that time, the Mud Whale was over-flowing with taboos and secrets.
It was an unspoken rule that no one mentioned the truth of our situation.
One of those truths never uttered...
...was about Ekató, who had disappeared six years earlier after being accused of being a spy.
BOO!



Speaking of ghosts, this girl is the one who really seemed like a ghost.
She is a mystery, and only ever appears to me.
I named her Neri.
WHAT IS IT?
WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?
I'M MELTING INTO THE WALL!
NO WAY...!
YANK
WHAT ARE THESE HAND THINGS?
That was the first time she took me to the room.


THE CLAY DOLL.
HMPH!
SO THIS IS WHERE YOU'VE BEEN HIDING!
Midén had been born there.
He told me he was the guardian of the island...
...a role given to him by his mother, Dýo.
HEE HEE


CALLING YOURSELF A GUARDIAN...
HOW SHIFTY CAN YOU GET?
YOU'RE THE ONE HURTING PEOPLE, RIGHT?
HURT-ING?


IT'S ALL FOR THE GOOD OF THE ISLAND.
MY WORK BEGAN SIX YEARS AGO...
...WHEN I TOOK CARE OF THE SPY.

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT EKATÓ.
MURDER-ER!!
HOW DARE YOU CALL YOURSELF A GUARDIAN?!
YOU ...
... YOU... EKATÓ!
I DON'T ACT ON MY OWN.


I DO EXACTLY AS MY MOTHER TELLS ME.
I AM MY MOTHER'S DOLL.
YOU'RE SAYING DÝO WANTED THAT?
WHY?
At the time...
...I believed that whether I could forgive Midén or not...
...was inconse-quential.
WHY ARE YOU CRYING?
I couldn't truly under-stand Dýo's decision, but...
...I knew that her hurt was far beyond mine.
I think I needed to yield to someone who had experienced more grief than I had.
STARE
So...


I decided to become Midén's friend.
There's still a part of me that is afraid of him.
Although I don't know if I can really call it friendship.
"PEOPLE'S HEARTS ARE COMPLI-CATED."
The definition of friendship becomes less certain.
But if in the short time that I was Midén's friend...


...I had been able to truly understand his heart...
...our story might have unfolded very differently.
WHY DO YOU ALWAYS CARRY MUD MOSS?
THESE ARE CALLED DĀKRY.
THEY FALL FROM FĀLAINA LIKE TEARS.
THEY ARE INFUSED WITH YOUR LIVES...
...AND THEY'RE GIVING ME THE ENERGY.
FOOF
SO YOU NEED OUR LIFE FORCE TO LIVE?
THE LIVES OF THE MARKED CREATED YOU, AND NOW WE'VE BECOME YOUR PREY...
I THOUGHT THE MUD WHALE WAS A PRISON FOR EXILED CRIMINALS...
...BUT IT'S ACTUALLY YOUR FEED BAG, MIDÉN.
THAT'S RIGHT.
WITHOUT YOU AND FĀLAINA, I'LL DIE.
SERI-OUSLY?
HEH
THAT'S NOT A VERY FUNNY JOKE.
I KNOW THAT!


OKAY, SO WHAT IF...
...WHEN OUR SENTENCE IS OVER, THE EMPIRE COMES TO COLLECT US...
...OR WHAT IF SOMEONE FROM THE OUTSIDE FINDS THE ISLAND AND WANTS TO TAKE US TO THEIR COUNTRY...
WHAT IF WE LEAVE THE ISLAND?
WHAT WILL YOU DO?
...
I CAN'T GO WITH YOU.
IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD, I'D EVEN-TUALLY STARVE TO DEATH.
SO...
I WON'T LET YOU LEAVE.
I'LL KEEP YOU AS MY FEED.
GRIN
NO ONE CAN OVERCOME MY THYMIA, SO RESISTANCE IS POINTLESS.
SHIVER


...
I'M KIDDING.
I WONDER IF THE SKY IS A DIFFERENT COLOR IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD?
DON'T KNOW ...
IT MIGHT BE.
I'VE NEVER SEEN IT EITHER.
WHAT COLOR DO YOU THINK IT IS?
YELLOW AND PURPLE STRIPES?
THAT'S JUST GROSS.
YOU THINK?
OBVI-OUSLY.
SO YOU'RE INTERESTED IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD, EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE A DOLL.
HE HAS THE SAME HEART WE DO...
THE HEART OF A PRISONER.
SIGH...


THE SKY IS SO BIG...
...BUT OUR WORLD IS SO SMALL AND CUMBERSOME.
MOTHER...
IF I PROTECT THIS ISLAND AND TURN IT INTO YOUR PARADISE...
...WILL I BE FREE?
CAN I BE FREE?


MAYOR ...
ABOUT THE PLANS FOR THE LIVING QUARTERS...
I THINK WE'LL GO WITH THE ONE THAT WILL MAKE EXPANSION EASIER LATER ON.
FINE ...
I LEAVE IT TO YOU.
STROKE
DÝO...
YOU'RE STILL SO BEAUTIFUL.
YOU'RE THE DEVIL. YOU'RE NOT NORMAL.
YOU ACT LIKE THE SUN...
...BUT IN THE SHADOWS, YOU CONTROL EVERYONE THROUGH FEAR.
YOU HAVE THE DAÍMONAS, RIGHT?
WHISPER
WE ALL HAVE SOME IDEA OF WHAT IT MIGHT BE.





I AM PROTECTING THIS ISLAND.
I WANT NOTHING MORE THAN THAT.
BUT...
...TO ACHIEVE THAT GOAL, I WILL DO WHATEVER I HAVE TO.




THIS CAN ONLY HAVE BEEN DONE BY *IT*...
OUR THYMIA CAN ONLY MOVE THINGS.
WE CAN'T SHRED SOME-THING LIKE THIS.
DAMN ...
IT'S RESORTED TO MURDER.




THIS ...
...IS THE LAST STRAW.
BUT NO ONE CAN BEAT IT.
THE GAP BETWEEN OUR ABILITIES IS TOO GREAT.

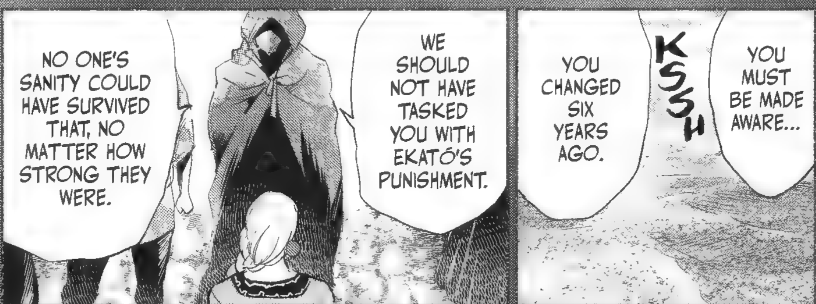

AND IF IT'S WILLING TO BREAK THE RULES LIKE *THIS*...

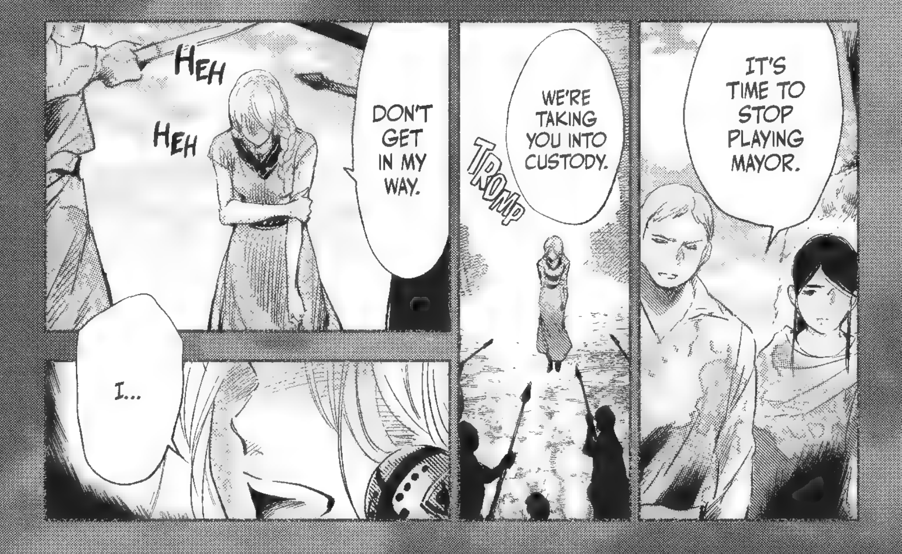

BUT ACCORDING TO LEGEND, IT HAS A HUMAN BODY...
IT'S NOT INDESTRUC-TIBLE.



IF WE CAN JUST AMBUSH IT BEFORE IT ATTACKS...
WHAT IS IT?
MAYOR DÝO...
WE ARE TERMINATING YOUR TENURE AS MAYOR AND LOCKING YOU IN THE BELLY.
INDEFINITELY.
WHY?
YOU KNOW WHAT YOU...
...DID WRONG.
YOU'VE BEEN CURSED SINCE YOU ACQUIRED POWER.
HAVEN'T YOU NOTICED?


I WANT TO PROTECT THIS ISLAND MORE THAN ANYONE.
ALL HIN-DRANCES TO THAT PURPOSE MUST BE REMOVED.
IF YOU CALL THAT CURSED, THEN THE LAWS OF THIS ISLAND ARE NON-SENSE.
THE PROBLEM IS THAT YOU HAVE NO REMORSE.


YOU MUST BE MADE AWARE...
KSSH
YOU CHANGED SIX YEARS AGO.
WE SHOULD NOT HAVE TASKED YOU WITH EKATÓ'S PUNISHMENT.
NO ONE'S SANITY COULD HAVE SURVIVED THAT, NO MATTER HOW STRONG THEY WERE.


IT'S TIME TO STOP PLAYING MAYOR.
WE'RE TAKING YOU INTO CUSTODY.
TROMP
DON'T GET IN MY WAY.
HEH
HEH
I...


I MUST TURN THIS ISLAND INTO A PARADISE OF LIBERATED EMOTIONS.
OTHER-WISE, THERE'S NO POINT, IS THERE?
I'LL DO WHATEVER I HAVE TO DO TO SEE IT THROUGH.
WHAT WAS THE POINT IN HAVING GIVEN BIRTH TO MIDÉN?
MIDÉN!
WHAT IS THE POINT OF ME AND MIDÉN?


THUMP
SHA
JUST AS WE THOUGHT ...
WE NEED TO END IT HERE...
SHF SHF
...AND DAMN THE CASUAL- TIES.
MIDEN...
...PLEASE.


HYOOO


UHN...
WHOA!
WHOOO
OH...
IS THIS YOUR REVENGE, MOTHER?
YOU WANT TO PROTECT THE ISLAND...
...BUT YOU'RE SEEKING VENGEANCE?


I'M ONLY A DOLL, BUT I UNDERSTAND YOUR HEART.
PEOPLE ARE...
...SAD...
...AND INCONVENIENT.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
THUD
TAKE THE CHILDREN OVER THERE- DON'T LET THEM COME ANY CLOSER!
HELP... ME...
THUD
GASP!
...!

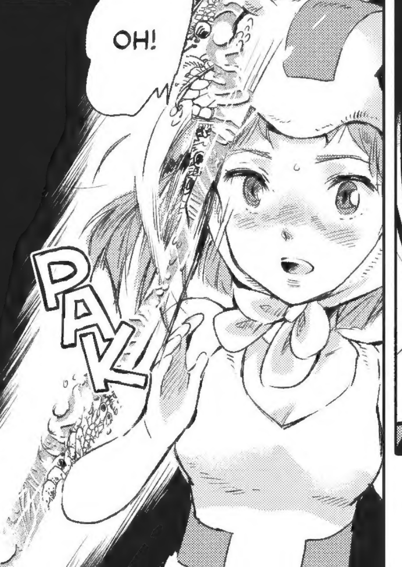

DASH
NO, BYAKU-ROKU!
MIDÉN!
DASH
MIDÉN!!
CHAKURO ...
CHAKURO, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?


GASP!


WHAT IS THAT?
YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOO–



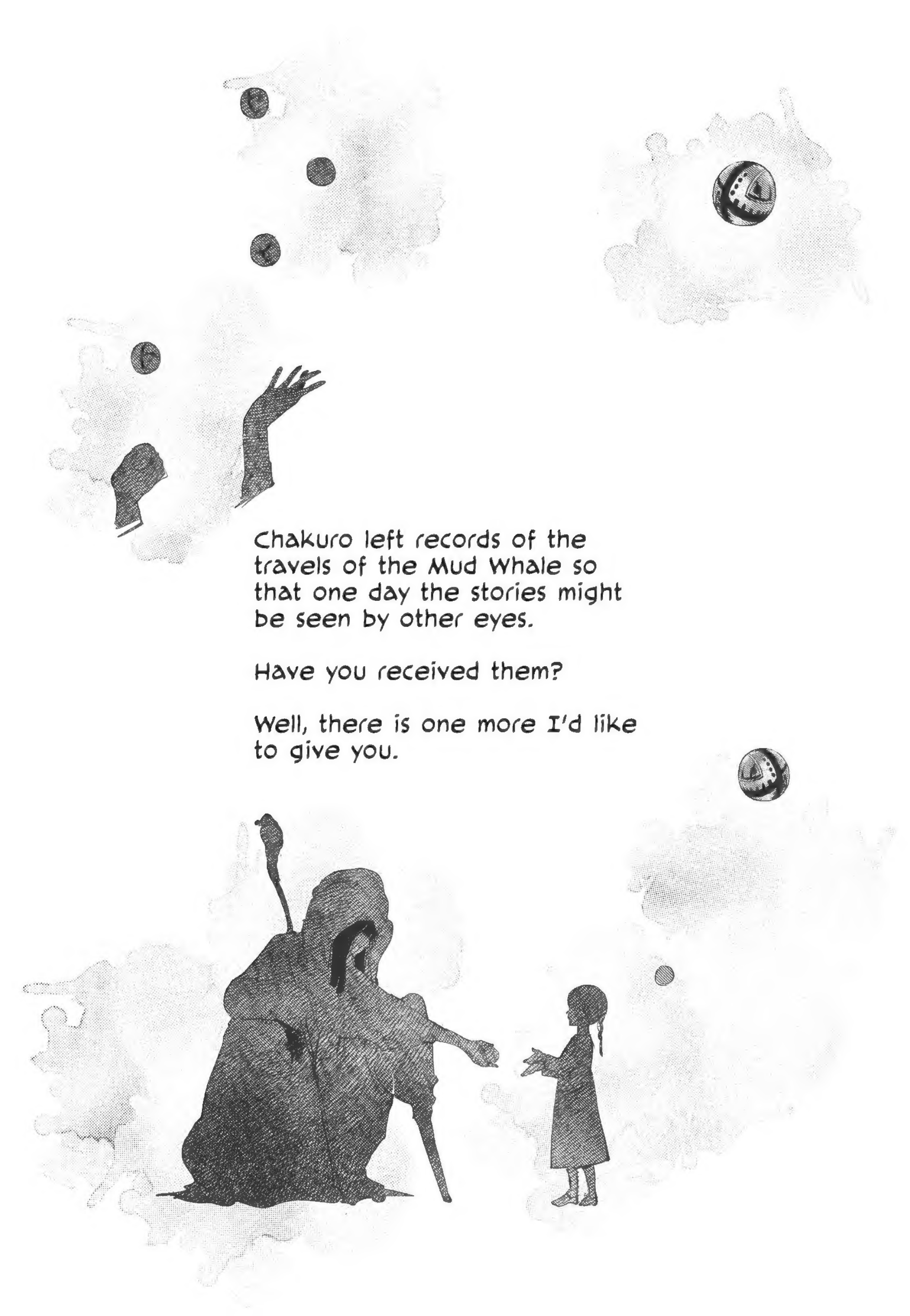



OH!
PAK


ARE YOU FEELING BETTER, OUNI?
PHEW

KRAKLL

The Color of the Far-Off Sky -The End-


Chakuro left records of the travels of the Mud Whale so that one day the stories might be seen by other eyes.
Have you received them?
Well, there is one more I'd like to give you.


First appeared in
Mystery Bonita magazine
December 2012 issue